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# Labyrinth, the Shape of the Modern Mind: Kafka, Auster, Borges

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COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

# Labyrinth, the Shape of the Modern Mind

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Kafka, Auster, Borges

**Jiwon Hahn**

April 2013

**Advisor Professor Lawrence A. Rosenwald**

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Prerequisite for Honors in Comparative Literature  
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*Errare humanum est.*

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## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	3
Labyrinth, its Meaning .....	3
The Birth of the Labyrinth .....	5
The Labyrinth and its Creator .....	7
Flâneur in the City-Labyrinth .....	8
Detective Stories as Labyrinths .....	10
<b>Kafka the Minotaur</b> .....	12
The Trial ( <i>Der Prozeß</i> ) .....	12
Parables .....	18
The Castle ( <i>Das Schloss</i> ) .....	21
“The Burrow” ( <i>Der Bau</i> ) .....	29
<b>Auster the <i>Flâneur</i></b> .....	32
City of Glass .....	32
Ghosts .....	41
The Locked Room .....	47
<b>Borges the Daedalus</b> .....	55
“The Circular Ruins” and “The House of Asterion” .....	57
“Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari, Murdered in His Labyrinth” .....	61
“Death and the Compass” .....	63
“The Garden of Forking Paths” .....	66
“The Immortal” .....	70
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	75
<b>Selected Bibliography</b> .....	80

## Introduction

### Labyrinth, its Meaning

What *is* a labyrinth? The fundamental elements of the common understanding of labyrinth can be uncovered in its lexical definition:

*labyrinth* n. *A structure consisting of a number of intercommunicating passages arranged in bewildering complexity, through which it is difficult or impossible to find one's way without guidance; a maze; an intricate, complicated or tortuous arrangement (of physical features, buildings, etc.); a tortuous, entangled, or inextricable condition of things, events, ideas, etc.*<sup>1</sup>

Thus a labyrinth is an architectural work in which one gets lost. “Maze” is a synonym. The last definition quoted demonstrates that the “intricate and confusing” aspect of a labyrinth renders it a metaphor, applicable even to abstract ideas.

The etymology of the term “labyrinth” remains uncertain. The most widely accepted interpretation, proposed by Maximilan Mayer in 1892, asserts that *labyrinthos* is a house of the double-headed ax (*labrys*). The cult of the double-headed ax has been associated with Knossos, the largest Bronze Age archaeological site on Crete, where the Palace of Minos is. Though enticing, the notion has been challenged, because *labrys* was only the Lydian word for double ax; in Greece it was called *pelekys*, and on Crete by yet another name, *wao*. In addition, the cult of the double ax is also founded upon insufficient evidence, as is its particular association with Knossos. As a result, apart from the suffix “-inthos,” usually employed in place names such as Korinthos, the etymology does not offer us any clarification of the concept.

In his eminent book on the history of labyrinths, Hermann Kern distinguishes a maze from a labyrinth, based on their forms recorded in historical documents. According to him, a maze is intersected with many paths, whereas a labyrinth has only one:

[I]n a labyrinth, there is a single, undeviating path to the center. The walker is not confronted with problems of orientation and can instead direct his or her attention inwardly, concentrating on the significance of the journey. By contrast, the path to the center of a maze is determined by the choices the walker makes at intersections, which can

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<sup>1</sup> *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971. Print.

be done only by concentrating on externals. The center of a maze can be found only if the walker takes the initiative, by constantly working to orient and redirect him- or herself toward the goal. In a labyrinth, success is a natural consequence of the path's design; the walker is guided to the center by the existing framework. Both structures serve as entirely different exercises, offering different types of experience.<sup>2</sup> (316)



Figure 1 Classical Cretan labyrinth

Despite the historical distinction between maze and labyrinth, the contemporary labyrinth encompasses the idea of the maze. Yet Kern's differentiation allows us to disentangle the complex concept of the labyrinth in use today. The confusion between labyrinth and maze blurs the boundary between the internal and the external experience of being lost. The assurance that the walker can concentrate on meditation without losing the way has vanished. Inside a labyrinth, nothing is

certain anymore—what lies in the center, if there is a center, what are the shape and size of the labyrinth, and most importantly, whether each choice is the right one in finding the center or the exit. Hyperconscious of being lost and alone, an individual explores the environment and reflects upon each and every choice that may be irrevocable. Thus the wanderer gains insight in both surrounding and mind. The labyrinth therefore proves to be a site of intellectual and philosophical challenge.

What one learns in the journey, however, does not lead to success in reaching the center or escaping the labyrinth. What the labyrinth-maze discloses, instead of the “answer,” is its remarkable resemblance to the world: making one's own judgment at every turn despite never “understanding,” so to speak, the big picture. Experience in the labyrinth parallels life itself: one constantly learns about the external world as well as the self. Yet nothing is ever sure while living inside the labyrinth. From this emerges the classical

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<sup>2</sup> Kern. Hermann, *Through the Labyrinth*. Trans. Abigail H. Clay with Sandra Burns Thomas and Kathrin A. Velder. New York: Prestel Verlag, 2000. Print.

metaphor of the Christian wayfarer, the pilgrim personifying the Christian soul, who wanders in the world-labyrinth (207). The walker is therefore further bewildered about the boundary between inside the labyrinth and outside, between pre-labyrinth and post-labyrinth existence.

It is important to note, however, that the experience of the labyrinth still signifies a departure from daily life, a change that can bring about an extraordinary event. Kern explains that because “the walker must turn around and retrace his or her steps” in the one-path labyrinth, its experience becomes a distancing of oneself from one’s own path and thus a new beginning: “A walker leaving a labyrinth is not the same person who entered it, but has been born again into a new phase or level of existence; the center is where death and rebirth occur” (30). The intra-labyrinth experience imitates life itself but remains extraordinary due to the intricate design of the architecture.

### The Birth of the Labyrinth

Minos determined to rid his home of this shameful sight, by shutting the monster away in an enclosure of elaborate and involved design, where it could not be seen. Daedalus, an architect famous for his skill, constructed the maze, confusing the usual marks of direction, and leading the eye of the beholder astray by devious paths winding in different directions. Just as the playful waters of the Maeander in Phrygia flow this way and that, without any consistency, as the river, turning to meet itself, and sees its own advancing waves, flowing now towards its source and now towards the open sea, always changing its direction, so Daedalus constructed countless wandering paths and was himself scarcely able to find his way back to the entrance, so confusing was the maze. (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Bk. VIII)<sup>3</sup>

“Labyrinth” as a proper noun designates the architectural work that Daedalus built for the Cretan king Minos. It was originally constructed to imprison the Minotaur, a half-man, half-bull creature born of Pasiphaë, the queen of Crete and daughter of Helios. A Cretan bull was given to Minos by Poseidon as an answer to his prayer to become a king, and Pasiphaë’s violent passion for the bull was a curse sent by Aphrodite when Minos refused to sacrifice the beautiful bull after his wish came true. Though the actual causality of the event appears to put the entire blame on Minos, Pasiphaë’s lust still largely characterizes her, the daughter of Helios, the pre-Olympian, Titan god of the sun. Sharply

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<sup>3</sup> Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Trans. Mary M. Innes. London: Penguin Books, 1955. Print. p. 183.



distinguished from Apollo and almost considered a simple personification of the sun, Helios is often associated with a crudeness that verges on bestiality, in stark contrast to the refined elegance of Olympian order. On the other hand, Minos, whose name literally means “king” in Cretan, becomes the judge of the dead in the underworld after his death. Minos, the king who commissions the refined architecture to control the beast, represents order and civilization, and constitutes the antithesis of his shameful wife. From the two opposite parents arises the complex identity of the Minotaur, who cannot be simply dismissed as a monster. His name, “Minotaur,” is split between Minos and Taurus, man and beast.

Another name of the Minotaur is Asterion, “star-like.” Shared by Minos’ foster father, this name underscores the paternal lineage that continues from Asterion to Minos to Minotaur/Asterion, though without biological relation. When Athens has to offer seven youths and seven maids as a sacrifice to the Minotaur every nine years, Theseus, prince of Athens, volunteers to go among them and slay the beast. Minos’ daughter Ariadne falls madly in love with him and gives Theseus a thread to trace his path back out. Some say that the furious king locked up Daedalus and his son in the labyrinth after Theseus fled with Ariadne, and others that the two were imprisoned from the moment the labyrinth was constructed, because Minos wanted the secret of the Minotaur to be absolutely safe. Nevertheless, the architect, lost in the middle of his creation, makes artificial wings to escape. Miraculously, the wings work to help the two fly out of the grotesque architecture. But his son Icarus flies so high that the wax melts, the wings fall apart, and he falls into the sea.

Re-reading the myth of the archetypal Labyrinth uncovers fundamental aspects of the labyrinth as a literary motif in the works to be discussed in this study. First and foremost, the Labyrinth is constructed in order to control reality. The need to build a labyrinth results from Minos’ desire to escape the reality shared with the Minotaur. The Labyrinth’s wall separates reality safely from the Minotaur. But reality always *contains* the Minotaur so that Minos still has to make human sacrifice. The Labyrinth protects reality not only from the physical presence of the Minotaur, but also from its ideal presence, full of contradictions challenging the established binary understanding of the world. The

existence of the Minotaur questions the boundary between man and animal, lust and love, god and man, father and son. Minos' own mother, Europa, was kidnapped by Zeus in the form of a bull, and Asterion is the name of his foster father. The Minotaur echoes Minos' parentage as well as his own deeds. The Minotaur, seen as a visualization of sexual desire, also represents a repressed *id*, and the duality of its identity foreshadows the Cartesian dualism of mind and body. The attempt to discipline the reality engages a compartmentalization, unnatural and artificial. Yet the Labyrinth's indecipherable design, which surpasses the capacity of its own creator, implies that its construction only provides another reality that essentially lies out of one's control. In other words, it is a controlled reality that is out of control.

But the labyrinth can definitely provide a localization of horrendous or uncomfortable realities in a corner of one's psyche. The most interesting aspect of the labyrinth is perhaps that even when it is a concentrated localization of chaos, it appears to be orderly in logic and elaborate in design, to the point of being beautiful. This juxtaposition of chaos and order in a labyrinth again reminds us of Pasiphaë and Minos.

### The Labyrinth and its Creator

The fact that Daedalus could not find his way out of the Labyrinth is the bitter irony of the myth, especially considering that one version of the story tells that he was the one who provided the thread clue to Ariadne. The thread points to an unusual aspect of labyrinth as a prison, that there is an opening that can serve as both an entrance and an exit. Ariadne takes advantage of this simple truth and reminds us that if there is a way in, there is bound to be a way out. But unlike Theseus' fortunate case, it is often the case in modern literature that the protagonist does not know how one enters the labyrinth-like existence. The connection between intra-labyrinth and extra-labyrinth is lost so that a modern man, thrown into the labyrinthine existence and without a memory of having entered it, cannot help but wander. But once inside a labyrinth, its order or truth is denied to the wanderer, as it was the case for the Daedalus. In the world-labyrinth, chaos is all that a modern man sees. Order is illusionary and misleading, but he has to keep searching.

Does the sophisticated design of the labyrinth point to a figure of supernatural intelligence who created the world-labyrinth? The answer matters little. The emergence of the world-labyrinth already challenges any absolute figure since the world-labyrinth *includes* the creator's reality. He may suffer from the pre-world-labyrinth amnesia as well. The creator becomes imprisoned, duplicating Daedalus in spatial and temporal realms simultaneously: outside a labyrinth and inside, before the labyrinth and after it. The relationship between the labyrinth and its creator translates into a structural device of *mise-en-abyme*<sup>4</sup> in fiction, which is essentially a story within a story. In the following passage, Borges describes confusion and horror the device of *mise-en-abyme* can produce, parallel to the idea of the Daedalus being imprisoned in his creation:

Why does it disturb us that the map be included in the map and the thousand and one nights in the book of the *Thousand and One Nights*? Why does it disturb us that Don Quixote be a reader of the *Quixote* and Hamlet a spectator of *Hamlet*? I believe I have found the reason: these inversions suggest that if the characters of a fictional work can be readers or spectators, we, its readers or spectators, can be fictitious.<sup>5</sup>

### Flâneur in the City-Labyrinth

In the modern world, the world-labyrinth metaphor arises naturally from the development of metropolitan and labyrinthine cities. The concept of *flâneur* is an imperative tool in understanding the experience inside the city-labyrinth. The French term cannot be directly translated in English. Its approximations or overtones include stroller, walker, dandy, saunterer, idler, man of the crowd. In literature, the *flâneur* in French is preceded by Poe's short story, "Man of the Crowd" (1840), in which the narrator observes the bustling street from above and then plunges into the crowd to pursue a particular man through meandering streets and dark corners of London. Baudelaire transposes the concept to the changing Parisian topography, thus transforming the Londonian "man of the crowd" into the Parisian *flâneur*. The Baudelarian conception can be read in several of his poems, such as "Le Crépuscule du soir" and "À une passante."

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<sup>4</sup> More often associated with visual arts, *mise-en-abyme* or *-abîme* as a literary term means "internal reduplication of a literary work or part of a work." First coined by Andre Gide, the word literally means "put in abyss" or "placed into abyss." For more discussion, see *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*.

<sup>5</sup> Borges, Jorge Luis. "Partial Magic in the *Quixote*." Trans. James E. Irby. *Labyrinth: Selected Stories and Other Writings*. New Directions Publishing, 1964. Print.

Walter Benjamin analyzes and develops the notion of *flâneur* to its fullest in the social and literary background of the time. In *The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire* (1937-1938), Benjamin compares Poe's *flâneur* with Baudelaire's. To Poe, the *flâneur* is "someone who does not feel comfortable in his own company" and seeks the crowd as an asylum.<sup>6</sup> (27) Baudelarian *flâneur*, on the other hand, is "someone abandoned" who seeks the crowd as "the latest narcotic" (31). The sense of abandonment, isolation and alienation savored in the middle of a crowd is a uniquely modern and metropolitan phenomenon. The crowd dissolves into the cityscape. The *flâneur* is a solitary wanderer in the city-labyrinth, but who in turn constitutes the cityscape at the same time. In this sense, the *flâneur* resembles the creator/wanderer of the labyrinth. In the archetypal myth, the imprisoned Minotaur and the triumphant Theseus represent two opposites as possible versions of the wanderer. Daedalus, the creator/wanderer, remains outside the system of the labyrinth, as a premise of its existence. The modern *flâneur* is situated between the Minotaur and Theseus, abandoned and abandoning, at home and exiled at the same time.

Roaming around the city in self-abandonment, the *flâneur* gains a unique perspective in observing and interpreting the spatial context. Sven Birkerts describes Benjamin's *flâneur* as follows:

The flâneur is the collector and connoisseur of detail...[T]he whole has been scattered, by time, by history, by the hubris of progress...and the flâneur, by drawing together bits and pieces from the rubble, can discover its echo. The flâneur is, thus, dedicated to the surveying of space, for it is only in space, in the network of layered particulars, that the successive images of time are concretized. Space exists to take the print of time.<sup>7</sup> (165)

The city is a dimension on which time accumulates; the *flâneur* embodies the modern existence as a passerby of the world, fleeting and unimportant. The purpose of *flânerie* thus lies in the celebration of purposelessness. But at the same time, the *flâneur* observes and absorbs the particulars of ephemeral existence as much as possible. The hyperconsciousness of spatial surrounding corresponds to the experience of being in a

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<sup>6</sup> Benjamin, Walter. *Selected Writings*. Trans. Edmund Jephcott and others. Ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. Vol. 4. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003. Print.

<sup>7</sup> Birkerts, Sven. "Walter Benjamin, Flâneur: A Flanerie." *The Iowa Review*, Vol. 13, No. 3/4 (Spring, 1982). Print. pp. 164-179.

labyrinth, in which the wanderer makes each decision, which may as well be irreversible, based solely on observation of the unfamiliar surroundings.

### Detective Stories as Labyrinths

When “[a]n observer is the *prince* who is everywhere in possession of his incognito,” everyone becomes “something of a conspirator” so that “everybody will be in the position of having to play detective” (Benjamin 21-22). Under the mask of incognito, the *flâneur* accesses a level of observation that resembles surveillance of a detective:

[T]he masses appear as the asylum that shields an asocial person from his persecutors. Of all the menacing aspects of the masses, this one became apparent first. It lies at the origin of the detective story. (21)

The genre of the detective story shares a prominent trait with labyrinths: one has to *figure them out*. In a labyrinth, which is by definition incomprehensible and impenetrable, the active gesture of “figuring out” turns out to be an illusion. In a detective story, the reader follows the detective-protagonist’s brainwork, based on the clues intentionally scattered by the writer, as the wanderer in a labyrinth “reads” the paths laid by the designer. In the conventional detective fiction, the distance between the reader’s perspective and the “Private eye”<sup>8</sup> (9) of the detective is solid and clear. In addition to the extraordinary intelligence of the detective (or the criminal, in Arsène Lupin’s case), the reader is provided only with a limited grasp of the case as presented in the text. However, in a labyrinth, the distance between the perspective of the wanderer and that of the architect is deliberately diminished. The identification derives not only from the world-labyrinth metaphor but also symbolically from the myth of Daedalus, the ingenious architect who could not escape his own brainwork. The labyrinth’s absolute impenetrability thus amounts to the near negation of the temporal causality for we cannot know which one comes first, among Daedalus, the Minotaur, and the Labyrinth. The Labyrinth was originally constructed to provide an alternative reality. But inside a labyrinth, it becomes “the” reality for the wanderers. They do not realize that their journey is not only inescapable but passive to an unavoidable degree, since the labyrinth puts even

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<sup>8</sup> Auster, Paul. *The New York Trilogy*. London: Penguin Books, 1986. Print.

the ultimate actor, its own creator, into passive imprisonment. The inevitable passivity of the journey challenges any motivation to voluntarily begin one, apart from the pure intellectual joy of engaging with a difficult problem.

Then what exactly *is* this labyrinth as a “case”? Finding one’s way to the center to penetrate the transcendental truth that explains the worldly order or human mind? To slay the Minotaur, the reason behind the labyrinth’s construction, so that the horrifying concept of labyrinth can crumble? Escaping this simulacrum and going back to real reality? Grasping the philosophy and art with which the designer created the labyrinth? As in the classical labyrinth with only one path to follow, the reader of labyrinthine literary works can only tread the one thread of words, both passively and actively.

## Kafka the Minotaur

Franz Kafka neither uses the word “labyrinth” often nor exploits the motif of labyrinth explicitly in most of his work. Yet many critics comfortably describe Kafka’s work as being “labyrinthine” for its profound obscurity and complexity. This chapter will first outline particular elements in *The Trial* to identify a labyrinth, then offer a comparative analysis of *The Castle*. A discussion on parables, “Before the Law” in *The Trial* and “An Imperial Message” in “The Great Wall of China,” will bridge the two sections on the novels. An investigation of the physical labyrinth in “The Burrow,” one of the last stories written by Kafka, will conclude the chapter.

### The Trial (*Der Prozeß*)

*The Trial*, written between 1914 and 1915, portrays the “process” or “proceedings” of Josef K. in an unfamiliar and invasive legal system. He simply wakes up one morning to find himself “arrested.” During the trial, the separation between his pre-trial and post-trial lives is unclear even though the morning of his thirtieth birthday clearly designates the departure from the past, and thus the entrance to the labyrinth. In the middle of the trial, K. is unsure of its every aspect despite his best efforts—why he is put on a trial, how he can defend himself, whether he can defend himself, against whom or what he is fighting—just as a wanderer does not know anything about the labyrinth in which he walks. This ignorance produces the irony of his claim to innocence, which Franz the guard points out: “[K.] admits he doesn’t know the law and at the same time claims he’s innocent.”<sup>1</sup> (9) Still, his belief in innocence does not waver until the end. As demonstrated in the penultimate chapter at the Cathedral, K. nevertheless journeys on. Convinced of his intellectual capacity and moral superiority, K. attempts to manipulate the situation to conquer the Court system. But the Court system is supposed to be a “great legal organism...eternally in balance” (86), without mistakes or oblivion. Cut off from the privileges he enjoyed as a successful bank

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<sup>1</sup> Kafka, Franz. *The Trial*. Trans. Mike Mitchell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. Print.

official and alienated from the logic of the pre-trial existence, Josef K. is helpless and destitute.

Whereas the archetypal Labyrinth served almost a psychoanalytic function of repression for Minos, the process for K. in *The Trial* is an inversion of repression: it uncovers the repressed and unpacks the unreasonable. Two prime examples of this function of the trial-labyrinth are the lumber-room (*Rumpelkammer*) scene and K.'s sexual pursuits. Before the trial begins, K. has always assumed that a particular inconspicuous room with a closed door was a lumber-room. One day, he hears a noise and opens its door, to find, as he expected, a lumber-room. But inside the room was a thrasher punishing two naked men—the guards who arrested K. His complaint about them, in fact, has caused this violence, making an eerie parallel between the act of complaint and the action of opening the door, as if to imply that the punishment would not have occurred at all if he left the door closed. There follows the blurring of the boundary between the internal and the external. The periphery of the physical environment of everyday life suddenly represents the subconscious. One of the guards being thrashed is named Franz and his name designates him a different *Doppelgänger* of Kafka than K. Franz asks K.: "Can you call that justice?" (59) Considering that Franz is excessively punished for a minor crime, the parallel between K. and Franz suggests the possibility that K.'s small wrongdoing, which he does not even remember, could by itself have brought about the absurd process. This possibility reminds us of the ambiguous first sentence of *The Trial*: "Someone must have been telling tales about Josef K., for one morning, without having done anything wrong, he was arrested" (5). Disturbed, K. tries to bribe the thrasher, but when a messenger approaches the scene, he quickly closes the door and walks away. He even tells the messenger that Franz's scream was nothing but a dog's howling. The phrase is gravely echoed by K.'s last words: "Like a dog!" (165) Diverting his attention and closing the door, K. wishes that the scene would erase itself from the existence as it vanishes from his sight. However, when K. opens the door the next day, he finds that the scene is continuing, largely unchanged. This upsets K. to the verge of tears.



As the Court's encroachment in K.'s life reverses its every condition, his repressed sexual desire opens its eyes. The nature of his relationships changes as well. Whereas K. had control over the relationship with Elsa, his new sexual encounters with Fräulein Bürstner, the wife of the servant, and with Leni are out of his control. After reenacting the arrest scene with a bizarre intensity, K. sexually assaults Fräulein Bürstner "like a thirsty animal furiously lapping at the water of the spring it has found at last" (26). The animal imagery demonstrates that the irritation of normal life has unsealed the latent desire he has suppressed under the surface. In the labyrinth reality, the wanderer scrutinizes his own situation and surrounding. His wandering grants K. the illumination of what has always been part of him but has been ignored thus far under the normal system of society and thoughts. K. also attempts to sexually conquer the wife of the Court's servant, in order to take revenge on the examining magistrate. But the manifestation of his sexual desire, combined with his desire to beat the Court, is impeded again by the Student. The loss of control in his private life, despite the bitter frustration that follows, still allows K. to freely explore his sexual appetite, as if the alternate reality of the trial had liberated a part of him. In *The Trial*, K. thus goes through a self-discovery that does not elevate him to become an intellectual triumphant over the absurdity, but degrades him into a subordinate of the Court. This aspect becomes evident when K. originally considers Leni to be his conquest; he later learns that it was she who was collecting defendant lovers.

In fact, the whole trial can be compared to the structure of the labyrinth. Not only psychologically, as demonstrated above in the unpacking of the repressed, but topographically, the Court/Process represents the periphery of his reality. The Court offices are in the poor district of the city, where K. has never been before, and the lumber-room was so ordinary that he always walked past it. The marginalized trial reality questions its own veracity and, at the same time, challenges the reality of norms, its center and past. As the process progresses, the boundary between pre-trial reality and trial reality becomes increasingly unclear. In the arrest scene, the guards intrude into K.'s bedroom against which he reacts violently. In the last chapter, however, K. is the one waiting for the men.

Kafka's labyrinth in *The Trial* is crowded with people, like defendants sitting in the narrow corridor of court offices and the audience at the first hearing, as opposed to the Labyrinth which is built to isolate the Minotaur. The modern city-labyrinth dehumanizes the other characters who are effectively part of the labyrinth and therefore of the Court system. Most of the people populating *The Trial* lack individuality and are considered only as a part of the group that characterizes them. For example, the "young men at the bottom of the table...had almost no rank at all, in general terms alone, as if they were not individuals but just an undifferentiated mass" (175) and "Frau Grubach's tenants always appeared as a single group, they stood together, a row of heads with mouths open, like an accusing chorus" (183). The more K. becomes immersed in his trial, the more he becomes part of a category. Leni desires K. simply for being a defendant. The category reduces K. to the equivalent of the wretched corn merchant, who is locked up in the maid's room like a dog and kisses the lawyer's hand. In the last chapter, K. is dressed like the two men who come to pick him up. "[T]he three of them form[ed] such a single unit...It was a kind of unit only inanimate objects can usually form" (161).

In the cases of characters *with* individual portraits, they serve as different landmarks or paths inside the trial-labyrinth—the Lawyer, the many women K. encounters, the artist and so on. All of them seem to be familiar with the trial reality and possibly with fragmentary clues that may lead to K.'s penetration of the trial-labyrinth's truth or his escape from it. But none of them offer clear signposts to K., who is essentially alone in his fight against the invisible legislative body. The asserted regularity and hierarchy behind the apparent chaos produce a sense of extreme annoyance and anxiety in K. The incompatibility of K. with the Court is symbolically exhibited in the scene where K. feels vertigo and cannot even breathe in the court offices. K. is thus unable to act in the legal system's terms or to understand its values, however hard he tries. The trial-labyrinth, by taking both the horizontal form of physical space and the vertical form of its hierarchy, takes over the reality entirely. To overcome the trial reality, K. employs a logical (in the sense of his pre- or extra-trial life) approach, by asserting the right to learn the proof and the reason behind it all. When it fails, he moves on to a social approach, by trying become

acquainted with the authorities through the help of its subordinates; then finally to an individual struggle, writing his defense on his own. But in the process, K. is exhausted by the recurring sense of powerlessness. His frequent gazes out the window symbolize the desire to escape the trial reality as well as the status of inaction and impotency. In the end, when all approaches prove futile, K. quits this labyrinth by being executed.

K. can also be described as a former *voyeur* brought down to the level of a *marcheur* in the modern city. In the middle of the unfamiliar crowd, having to attach magnified significance to minor details, K. is bewildered and frustrated. But as K. realizes the futility of attempts to understand or beat the Court, he effectively becomes the “man of the crowd,” and in the last chapter realizes the self-abandonment of the *flâneur*. The walk before the execution, when K. aimlessly follows a lady who looks like Fräulein Bürstner, represents the only true *flânerie* in the novel, where both external and internal explorations occur simultaneously. It is only then that K. executes the self-reflection long denied and repressed. Describing the purpose of following her as “solely so as not to forget the admonition she represented for him” (162), K. appears to regret his former behavior and vaguely admits his guilt to a degree. This small recognition is critical in bringing forth the following reflection: “I was always trying to interfere in the world with ten pairs of hands—and for an unacceptable goal at that” (162). The word “unacceptable” implies that K. admits his own limits, not only in intellectual capacity but also in moral behavior.

The futility of individual struggle against the grand scheme of the Court in relation to the motif of the labyrinth is demonstrated best in the parable of “Before the Law.” A country man waits outside the door of the Law with a doorkeeper, without success until the end of his life. Moments before his death, the country man asks why there is no one else asking to be let in. The doorkeeper replies that the door was intended only for him, so that he shall shut it now. The country man, who bribes the doorkeeper frequently and even pleads the fleas on the doorkeeper’s fur coat, is clearly a pejorative portrait of K., engaging himself with the legal authority in a manipulative manner. Also, as K. loses his will and power to defend himself any longer, so the country man withers in front of the door too.

The priest's remark that "[w]hat is written is unchanging, and opinions are often just an expression of despair at that" (157) can draw a parallel between text and labyrinth. Wanderings inside the labyrinth and opinions on a text can vary infinitely. But the labyrinth and text remain the same. As the priest chides K. for not respecting what is written and for changing the story (155), K. briefly participates in the dynamic overturning of the reader/writer and the Daedalus/Minotaur relationship. While insisting that the opinions do not matter, the priest presents a number of interpretations right after telling the story. The effect is that K. and the reader of *The Trial* face forking possibilities of interpretations without given a chance to directly penetrate the meaning themselves. One interpretation even insists that the doorkeeper is the one deceived instead of the country man:

It is claimed that [the doorkeeper] does not know the inside of the Law, only the path outside the entrance which he has to keep walking up and down. The ideas he has of the inside are considered childish, and it is assumed that he himself fears the things he wants to make the man afraid of. (157)

The blurring between the doorkeeper and the country man reminds the reader that the world-labyrinth is not designed by either the crowd or the *flâneur*. The different engagements are limited in a similar manner, so that no one can comprehend the labyrinth entirely. The world-labyrinth includes the walls and the wanderers alike, which can even be interchangeable from different points of view. The priest's statement that the Law is "beyond human judgment" reestablishes the impenetrability of labyrinth though K. gloomily remarks that it means "that the world is founded on untruth" (159)

But inside the labyrinth, a wanderer has freedom to choose roads as the reader is free to choose any interpretation. At the end of the chapter, the priest also tells K.: "why should I want anything from you? The court does not want anything from you. It receives you when you come and dismisses you when you go" (160). Even though this remark may appear contradictory to the omnipresent illustration of the Court in the novel, it also effectively expands the trial-labyrinth into the world-labyrinth, in which there is no clear distinction between the deceiver and the deceived. In fact, it is the nature of the Law/world/labyrinth that none can know one's role for sure.

Even though K. resists and argues against the parable, the reader can see that the story serves as a pivot, bringing about the difference in his behavior. For example, the priest had to shout at K. before telling the parable: "Can't you see even two steps in front of you?" (152) But after the discussion of the story, K. frankly admits that he "can't find [his] way in the dark" (159).

## Parables

"Before the Law" was, in fact, published separately in 1915, whereas *The Trial* was published posthumously (and famously against Kafka's own will). In *The Trial*, "Before the Law" not only creates the structure of *mise-en-abyme* typical of the labyrinth literature, but by recapitulating the entire novel, allows the fiction to include *itself*. Thus arises the infinite repetition of Scheherazade: the wanderer and K. are forever removed from the possibility of ever attaining the Law or the "truth" of the trial-labyrinth. The futility of trying to understand the labyrinth is highlighted in the "secret maxim" of Kafka: "Try with all your might to comprehend the decrees of the high command, but only up to a certain point; then avoid further meditation."<sup>2</sup> (240)

"An Imperial Message" is an almost complete inversion of "Before the Law." In fact, in their translation of Kafka's short stories, Willa and Edwin Muir situate "Before the Law" and "An Imperial Message" at the very beginning of the compilation, as "Two Introductory Parables." Whereas the country man could not get into the Law, the messenger from the Emperor cannot get out. The palace has innumerable passages and people and even if the strong messenger successfully escapes of the palace, there is the whole capital obstructing his way. As opposed to the unending hope in "Before the Law," represented by bribes, conversations and the open door, the unwavering despair dominates "An Imperial Message": "never will he get to the end of them; and if he succeeded in that nothing would be gained...never, never can that happen...Nobody could fight his way through here even with a message from a dead man" (5).

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<sup>2</sup> Kafka, Franz. *The Penguin Complete Short Stories of Franz Kafka*. Ed. Nahum N. Glatzer. London: Allen Lane, 1983. Print. Referred to simply as *Complete*.

“An Imperial Message” is situated within a longer fiction as well, “The Great Wall of China.” Even if it may not be the complete summary of the “Great Wall,” the parable serves to highlight time as being another essential element of the experience inside a labyrinth. The wandering is drawn out not only spatially but also temporally: as there is the confusion between the external and the internal, so there is necessarily the confusion between the past and the present. In “The Great Wall of China,” the vastness of the land makes the narrator question the reality of the bureaucratic system of China as a whole, just as K. is dubious about the invisible legislative system in *The Trial*. The spatial expanse ultimately dissolves the concept of the linear, orderly and ordinary progression of time. Since any news takes extremely long to travel, by the time it arrives, the “news” is already something of the past. The authority of the written words of news, along with its punctuality, is undermined. The confusion between which comes first and how, among labyrinth, its creator and its wanderer transfers into the one among text, writer and reader.

The linearity of time is also challenged by rewriting history and mixing preexisting myth with it. The use of myth and axiom in Kafka’s parable weaves a web of the timeless present. The reader is the one who should figure out which is a real myth and which is Kafka’s own. By intermixing them, Kafka also exhibits that myth remains a parable of mankind only so long as it stays true to the present; in other words, only because it defies its own historicity as the proof of truth. Kafka thus uses words as a tool to transcend the temporal linearity and to create his own version of the general truth of mankind, pertinent to the modern world. This labyrinth made of words insists on its own antiquity and timelessness; in consequence, the veracity and authority of words, or the labyrinth reality, is to be challenged and contemplated by the reader. But the possibility of surmounting the linearity via words introduces infinity to a labyrinth. Erich Heller’s essay illuminates further the role of infinity and the structure of *mise-en-abyme* in achieving the confusion:

Kafka’s novels take place in infinity. Yet their atmosphere is as oppressive as that of those unaired rooms in which so many of their scenes are enacted. For infinity is incompletely defined as the ideal point where two parallels meet. There is yet another place where they

come together: the distorting mirror. Thus they carry into the prison of their violently distorted union the agony of infinite separation.<sup>3</sup> (134)

“The Great Wall of China” incorporates another parable, “The City Coat of Arms,” which rewrites the legend of Tower of Babel. Kafka replaces the punishment and failure of men with the fierce conflict between men, so that the unending war inhibits the completion of the Tower. Whereas “[t]he essential thing in the whole business is the idea of building a tower that will reach to heaven” (433), this goal proves to be simply incompatible with the nature of men and thus can never be realized. The unreachable heaven can be associated with the impenetrable labyrinth. Men, by fighting with each other, defeat their own purpose without realizing that they are the cause; yet the realization will not alter the labyrinth reality, for men are *born* as men. Unless they cease to *be* men, which is to die like K. did, there is no way out of this labyrinthine existence. “Human nature,” writes Kafka in the story, “essentially changeable, unstable as the dust, can endure no restraint; if it binds itself it soon begins to tear madly at its bonds until it rends everything asunder, the wall, the bonds, and its very self” (239).

Amid the intricate net of *mise-en-abyme* between his longer stories and parables, Kafka invites the reader to explore the intertextual labyrinth of variations and interpretations. *The Castle* can be described as another version of “Before the Law” in which a free man, yet another K., struggles before an inaccessible and incomprehensible authority...or *is it?*

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<sup>3</sup> Heller, Erich. “The Castle.” *Franz Kafka*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986. Print. pp. 133-150.

## The Castle (*Das Schloss*)

*The Castle* is the third novel by Kafka, after *Amerika* or *The Man who Disappeared*<sup>4</sup> and *The Trial*. Kafka began to write *The Castle* in 1922, seven years after he wrote *The Trial*, and the work remains unfinished like the others.

*The Castle* exhibits a number of similarities to its precursor. First, both protagonists are K., even though K. the Land Surveyor lacks a first name. Yet the German word for Land Surveyor, *Landvermesser*, evokes countless implications, a rich literary effect that no first name could have imitated. The implications include *Vermessenheit* (hubris), *vermessen* (audacious), *sich vermessen* (commit an act of spiritual pride and also apply the wrong measure, make a mistake in measurement) (Heller 139). The profession of Land Surveyor bears a particular significance in the context of the labyrinth, since all that a wanderer strives to do is survey the physical space. But his goal is thwarted by the design of the labyrinth, and K. the Land Surveyor is only called thus, without actually carrying out the job in the village.

Another similarity is seen at the beginning of two novels. *The Trial* begins with K. waking up; K. in *The Castle* falls asleep only to be woken up in the next sentence. Both K.'s find themselves as strangers to the systems of the Court and of the Castle, their new reality. One is arrested without learning why, and the other journeys a long way from home, only to discover that he is not wanted. The Castle and the Court remain as impenetrable and incomprehensible as any labyrinth. These features of the Castle are demonstrated through physical inaccessibility and visual imperceptibility. K. cannot reach the Castle because of the design of the road, even though the spatial distance convinces K. that the Castle is easily reachable:

On he went, then, but it was a long way. This road...only went close to [Castle Hill] but then curved away, as if on purpose, and although it took no one farther from the castle, nor did it

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<sup>4</sup> The title of this first incomplete novel by Kafka is *Der Verschollene* in German. Max Brod, who published the novel posthumously, chose the title *Amerika* instead. Later critics also refer to a closer English translation of *Der Verschollene*, the title Kafka employed for tentative purposes: *The Man Who Disappeared*.



come any nearer. K. constantly expected the road to turn in the direction of the castle at last, surely it would, and it was only because he expected it that he kept going.<sup>5</sup> (11)

The phrase “as if on purpose” implies the existence of the road’s designer, who deliberately impedes any visitor from reaching the Castle and who may be the Daedalus figure of Kafka himself. The messengers or other people of the Castle, however, are described as nimble and fast. Physical access to the Castle is something real in *The Castle*, which marks a significant difference from *The Trial*, in which access to the real authority is uncertain. Barnabas the messenger is the principal example of someone who easily succeeds in penetrating the castle, without having been assigned an official position. But when K. attaches himself to Barnabas arm in arm, in order to reach the Castle by his help, he is characterized by his extreme physical immobility: “On they walked, but K. did not know where they were going, he recognized nothing...He held on tighter, Barnabas was almost dragging him along” (27). The Castle therefore remains as physically unapproachable for K. as it was visually imperceptible at first.

K. describes the first sight of the Castle as following: “nothing could be seen of Castle Hill, it was wrapped in mist and darkness, not a glimmer of light hinted at the presence of the great castle....K. gaz[ed] up into the seeming emptiness” (3). Though it is physically extant, the Castle’s reality is challenged, just as the Court’s absurdity and invasiveness question its formal authority throughout *The Trial*. Also, the reader is reminded of the lumber-room in *The Trial*. Like Josef K.’s opening of the door seems to have produced the thrasher scene, could the Castle be a conception in K.’s thoughts, a result of his intense gaze? But when K. attempts to reach the Castle on his own for the first time later in the novel, the Castle is visible: “[h]is eyes fixed on the castle, K. walked on” (9). A visual description follows, though meager, along with K.’s thoughts, comparing the landscape with his hometown. So the Castle’s reality does not lie absolutely out of reach, but is tantalizingly close and elusive, different from the Court. The trial-labyrinth surrounds and suffocates Josef K. slowly without ever offering any clear hint, apart from perhaps the artist’s explanation of the three possible outcomes, *if* it can be trusted. On the other hand, the

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<sup>5</sup> Kafka, Franz. *The Castle*. Trans. J. A. Underwood. London: Penguin Books, 1997. Print.

Castle is a pre-established set of rules and ideas, which is clear and natural to the villagers, but strange and incomprehensible to K. the Land Surveyor.

Whereas the top officials of the Court never appear in *The Trial*, Klammm personifies the authority of the Castle. K. even gets a glimpse of him through the spy-hole, although his view is disputed later. The forbidden vision of the authority evokes the figure of the doorkeeper of “Before the Law,” who cannot bear the sight of the third doorkeeper. Despite the overwhelming uncertainty, K. firmly believes that direct interaction with the people of the Castle, in other words, entering the Castle himself to speak for himself, will solve his problems. The following description of K.’s intense and private desire makes Klammm not only doorkeeper to the Law, but also the incarnation of Law or God:

K., he alone and no one else, should with his and no one else’s desires get close to Klammm, and get close to him not in order to come to rest in his presence but in order to go on, past him, into the castle. (100)

But the Castle and Klammm (whose name also begins with K) both remains inaccessible to K. A villager definitively tells K. that K.’s waiting outside the building to see Klammm on his way out is futile and that he will “miss [Klammm] in any case, whether [K.] wait or leave” (95).

Yet the incomprehensibility or inaccessibility of the Castle and the Court does not challenge their autonomous perfection. The mayor describes the Castle as “an operating principle of the authority that no allowance is made for possibilities of error. The principle is justified by the excellent organization all round” (58). His words remind the reader of the lawyer’s description of the Court as being “this great legal organism...remained eternally in balance” (*The Trial*, 86). In theory, the Castle and the Court should be the representation of order and hierarchy in order to be effective. But both demonstrate absurdity and randomness in Kafka’s fiction. The juxtaposition of expected order and frustrated chaos resembles the experience in a labyrinth: despite the logical beauty and intellectual sophistication in the design, inside one, the wanderer encounters boundless chaos. The Castle’s telephones symbolize such an aspect of the Castle. “[T]hat hissing and that singing are the only real and reliable things that the telephones here tell us, everything else is illusory” (65), says the mayor, explaining that there is no real telephone connection with

the Castle. In the Castle, most telephones are put on silence. Where it rings, whether the lowest department or highest, is not clear. This challenges the significance of a contact with the authority, even when there is one. The mayor says that he does not understand “how even an outsider can think that, when he calls Sordini, for example, it really is Sordini that answers” (65).

What is remarkable about K. the Land Surveyor is that he is never surprised, whereas Josef K. is often emotionally unsettled. K. replies immediately that even though he did not know the details, that he “did not have a lot of confidence” (65) and proceeds to insist that he would attach “real significance...only to what one learns or achieves actually in the castle” (66). But the mayor’s reply complicates the matter: “real significance attaches to these telephone replies, certainly, how could it not?” (66) Thus the significance of the letter from an official is real and important; it is simply not “official.” The mayor, like the priest in *The Trial*, calmly points out K’s ignorance: “All these contacts are merely apparent, but you with your ignorance of the circumstances regard them as real” (65). This statement echoes the priest’s remark about text and opinion, which is something that the mayor carries out in the scene with Klamm’s letter. In return, K. complains: “you interpret the letter so thoroughly that in the end nothing is left of it but the signature on a blank sheet of paper” (64).

One distinction between the Castle and the Court is that whereas the former is forgetful and indifferent, the latter supposedly “never forgets.” Gardena describes Klamm in the following passage:

A person you’ve forgotten, you can always get to know again. With Klamm, that’s not possible. A person he stops sending for, he has utterly forgotten not only so far as the past is concerned, but literally for all future time as well. (74)

In the Court, on the other hand, even when one achieves apparent acquittal, “[o]ne day, when no one’s expecting it, some judge will take a closer look at the file, will realize that the accused is still living, and order his immediate arrest” (*The Trial*, 113). The invasiveness of the Court results from and produces superimposition of the pre-Trial and post-Trial existence. The periphery can be defined as such only when it coexists with the center. The

spatial continuity thus makes possible the inversion of the periphery and the center. Josef K. inhabits the same city and goes to the same work only in a renewed context. In this new reality, K. exhibits a strong pre-Trial amnesia that constitutes a temporal disjunction, as if K. floated in existence only for a year between his thirtieth birthday and the thirty-first one. Despite the sharp disconnect in time and text, the absurdity of the Trial reality makes K. constantly question where it begins and ends. The blur between the external enforcement of the Court and the internal obsession of the Trial constitutes the important aspect of the experience of being in the trial-labyrinth.

However, in *The Castle*, pre-Castle experience is determinedly separated from the Castle experience, both spatially and temporally. There are nostalgic episodes where K. the Land Surveyor compares the present with the past or remembers his hometown or childhood. Especially in the face of hardships, his memory haunts K.: “On they walked, but K. did not know where they were going, he recognized nothing...His home kept cropping up, and memories of it filled his mind” (27). There is no room for nostalgia in the trial-labyrinth, but only for the desire to escape the labyrinth or conquer it. In addition, as opposed to the virtually unchallenged mystery of the Court, the Castle responds to K. more promptly than he expects. For example, Klammer’s letters and the mayor’s job offer demonstrate that authority is willing to act to assimilate K. Though K.’s mere presence can horrify the castle officers in the inn, the local community of the Castle remains infinitely kinder than the Court that hunts K. down.

In *The Trial*, characters abruptly spring into existence, just like K. himself. The characters familiar to the Court (the guards, the lawyer, the examining magistrate, the painter, Leni, etc.) present themselves in bizarre and episodic interactions. Like the thrasher and the guards, who appear to be personifications of K.’s own mind, they are part of the abstract and amorphous system of the Court. Even the characters from K.’s pre-Trial existence (Uncle, Fräulein Bürstner, the deputy manager, etc.) present themselves briefly with minimal individuality, for they are now redefined in the Court reality. The relations K. builds with the characters are powerfully symbolic, but often as elusive as the Court, e.g., K.’s pursuit of a young woman who looks like Fräulein Bürstner in the last chapter.

Interacting with the characters of *The Trial* is part of K.'s efforts to fight or escape the Court. Because it is never clear if anything can be done or known through them, social relations in *The Trial* constitute the experience of being in a labyrinth. K.'s unwavering confidence in his innocence, and his condescending attitude in his social position, ensure his position as the solitary wanderer who is frustrated over and over again, misled by wrong signposts.

K. the Land Surveyor, though, encounters a solid settlement of villagers. Some lack individuality, as do their counterparts in *The Trial*, and are described categorically. For example, even though K.'s two assistants have their own names, Jeremiah and Arthur, K. decides to call both of them Arthur, saying that "[t]he only difference between [them] is in [their] names, otherwise [they]'re as alike as...two snakes" (18). Like the guards in *The Trial*, the assistants seem like absurd projections of K.'s own mind, as if they were childish and uncontrollable limbs. But once dismissed, the two of them regain their individuality enough to carry out significant actions; Arthur files a complaint against K. and Jeremiah snatches Frieda from K. Later in the novel, it becomes clear that these villagers are fundamentally different from the characters of *The Trial*. Their history is displayed in detail through their gossip. They know the Castle and correspond to its will immediately, as seen in their overnight condemnation of Barnabas's family. As a result, the villagers do not serve as landmarks helping K. to pursue different paths to penetrate the labyrinth. The characters in *The Castle*, in a sense, can almost be said as being the varying versions of the priest of *The Trial*, who keep reminding K. that he is the ignorant outsider of the system, but free to leave it as well.

But K. the Land Surveyor does not intend to escape this system by leaving, despite Frieda's tender suggestions. Instead, he longs to settle down. In *The Castle*, the mass and the *flâneur* do not belong to the world-labyrinth together. In fact, the *flâneur* can only *flâner* in his own city, where aimless wanderings can provide a new perspective on familiar surroundings. The incompatibility between the surroundings and the stranger is not meant to bring about a self-reflection, as in *The Trial*, but potentially to provide a home one day in *The Castle*. K. the Land Surveyor's awareness of his freedom in choosing this village as his home proves the key difference between the two K.'s. That freedom alone does not keep

the Castle from being a labyrinth, since every choice in the labyrinth, even sometimes the entrance into the labyrinth, is perceived as free and independent. But even though the labyrinth can be a house, it cannot be *just* a house. That would defeat the purpose of its design. By being complicated, and thus implying the architect who first wove the conundrum, the labyrinth demands intellectual engagement that is more than simply inhabiting a physical space. Moreover, K.'s resolution, inspired by Frieda's love, is unlike a wanderer's doubt. Even after Frieda deserts him, K. does not even think to leave the village, and only feels displaced within it. Whereas Josef K. is told that "[t]he court...receives you when you come and dismisses you when you go" (*The Trial*, 160) and refuses to believe it, K. the Land Surveyor does not doubt his free will. Without such permanent doubt, the labyrinth that is both spatial *and* psychological cannot be established.

The difference between two K.'s clearly manifests in their attitudes with the alien reality. Whereas Josef K. angrily demands to talk to the guards' superior in the arrest scene, to insist on his former ways, K. the Land Surveyor is ready to confront and compromise. Often he admits his ignorance, yet still argues his case logically and eloquently. The most important difference between Josef K. and K. the Land Surveyor is that the latter K. embraces his ignorance as a means of justifying bold reactions to the system. He is resilient in his demand but willing to learn, as shown in his reply to the mayor:

Of course I'm ignorant, that remains true at all events and is extremely distressing for me, but it does have the advantage that the ignorant man dares more, so I shall gladly put up with ignorance and its undoubtedly dire consequences for a while, as long as my strength lasts. (50)

In the same conversation, K. exhibits the capacity to distance himself from his crisis which enables him to abstract and generalize his case, even though the mayor highlights again that K.'s ignorance as an outsider forever challenges the validity of any of his thoughts:

"I'm entertained...only in the sense...that it gives me an insight into the ludicrous confusion that may possibly determine the existence of a human being."  
"You've been given no insight as yet." (57)

Josef K. has a similar moment when he asks the priest, "How can a person be guilty anyway? We're all human, every single one of us" (*The Trial*, 152). Such an appeal for commiseration

is dismissed by the indifference of the Court, which only identifies the implication of guilt in K.'s statement: "but that's the way guilty people talk" (152).

In her essay on *The Castle*, Elizabeth Boa discusses with the concept of *Heimat*, the German term to describe "a physical place, or social place, or bounded medium which links the self with something larger through a process of identification signified by a spatial metaphor."<sup>6</sup> (61) Writing that K. the Land Surveyor is "[t]he modern hero" who "has arrived in a premodern world" (61), Boa contrasts the spatial settings of *The Trial* and *The Castle*, a modern city and a village respectively. This made me ask: Can there be a labyrinth, alluring with its intellectual sophistication and horrifying with its profound implications, in the countryside? Though many may describe jungles and forests as being labyrinthine, for the specific purposes of this study, I believe that it cannot. Incomprehensibility and complexity alone do not constitute a labyrinth that is both internal and external. Only the hint of human artifice will successfully coax a passerby, who will believe that if someone has made it, then someone can solve it. Like a difficult case, text or theorem, the labyrinth symbolizes the extraordinary human intelligence that even surpasses the capacity of its creator and therefore challenges the divine in the traditional sense. The frustration of being in a labyrinth is oddly paired with the exhilaration deriving from its beauty or perfection. In the eyes of a *flâneur* who scrutinizes the external instead of merely seeing it, the human triumph of cityscape becomes a magnificent labyrinth. The paradox of mass-self can proliferate only in the city; the world-labyrinth is therefore absent from the countryside of *The Castle*.

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<sup>6</sup> Boa, Elizabeth. "The Castle." *The Cambridge Companion to Kafka*. Ed. Julian Preece. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Print. pp. 61-79.

### "The Burrow" (*Der Bau*)

One of Kafka's longer short stories, "The Burrow" was written in 1923, a year before his death. Narrated from the perspective of an animal that digs the soil to build an elaborate burrow, the short fiction not only shows us a physical labyrinth but also directly employs the word "labyrinth" several times.

The first sentence of "The Burrow," "I have completed the construction of my burrow and it seems to be successful," (*Complete*, 325) announces the narrator "I" who, as a creator figure, resonates with the satisfaction of God in Genesis. The animal exhibits perfect intelligence and self-awareness and his monologue includes detailed description, rational explication and even existential contemplation. The burrow generates the alternate reality, detached from the world above the ground, and thus realizes the separation of the intra- and extra-labyrinth worlds. The physical separation is in turn supplemented and completed by the psychological distinction: "completely to trust someone outside the burrow when you are inside the burrow, that is, in a different world, that, it seems to me, is impossible" (338).

In the animal's elaborate burrow, there is a particular area near the entrance/exit that he calls a labyrinth. Made around the beginning of the burrow's construction, the labyrinth was started "half in play" (331) and was "too much of an idle *tour de force*," reminisces the narrator. But at the time, he had considered it "the crown of all burrows" and "theoretically brilliant" (331), since unwelcome intruders can be locked up in the labyrinth. He frequently considers reconstructing that part, but concludes that the labyrinth will probably remain for his "certain sentiment about this first achievement" (332). The labyrinth embodies a piece of impulsive irrationality, a flaw in his near-perfect burrow, and thus an antithesis to the perfect Castle Keep (*Burgplatz*). The animal even has dreams in which he reconstructs the labyrinth to make his burrow flawless. The "tormenting complications of this labyrinth" (333) are, as a result, both physical and psychological. Thus the animal loses his way in the labyrinth as well:



I am both exasperated and touched when, as sometimes happens, I lose myself for a moment in my own maze, and the work of my hands seems to be still doing its best to prove its sufficiency to me, its maker, whose final judgment has long since been passed on it. (333)

The labyrinth comes alive with its own will and intention against its creator. The labyrinth near the exit thus becomes the parable of the entire burrow and "The Burrow." When the animal begins to hear a noise everywhere in the burrow, he mourns not having built a better burrow with more precautions and devices. As he regrets having built the labyrinth despite the primary satisfaction, so the animal comes to feel the same emotion towards the entire construction, including even Castle Keep from which the sound can be heard as well. The animal becomes a betrayed and exhausted Daedalus in the middle of his own creation. His house that he thought he knew and protected suddenly turns against him with the strange sound, and the narrator becomes exiled at home.

In his essay on "The Burrow," Heinrich Henel writes that the narrator "mistakes the inner enemy for an external enemy...his searching and his theorizing are futile because of this mistake."<sup>7</sup> (121) The supreme intelligence as a tool for the animal's speculation is perhaps the very cause of his crisis since his thoughts seem to forbid him from grasping the situation as a whole. Instead, it ensures that he remains myopic:

The trouble with the rational intelligence...is that it cannot cope with the contingent. Moreover, reasoning is a self-defeating activity because every argument produces a counter-argument. Nothing is totally true or correct, but on the other hand, nothing is totally false or wrong. (*Complete*, 120)

Henel's observation that "[t]he specific problem investigated in "The Burrow" is the impossibility of self-knowledge despite most strenuous effort" (131) is applicable to Josef K. The alternate reality, though presented as something foreign rather than one's own design in *The Trial*, ultimately requires self-examination and both protagonists fail to do so. They instinctively turn the weapon of reason only towards the external, which appears to be unjustly persecuting the otherwise peaceful conscience. Many critics have suggested that the unbridled guilt at the hidden core of Kafka's conscience may be the cause for this tendency. Acknowledgement of guilt would forever destroy the undisturbed conscience;

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<sup>7</sup> Henel, Heinrich. "The Burrow," or How to Escape From a Maze." *Franz Kafka*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986. pp. 119-132.

and rationality is used to dispel the doubt of the guilt. As a result, one is required to seek the cause of the intrusion from outside the self. However, "[r]ationality... used to dispel fear...actually makes it worse, for in devising defenses against danger the mind constantly discovers new dangers" (Henel 121).

The identification between the burrow and the self, combined with the constant vigilance of rationality, results in the doubling of self: "it is as if I were not so much looking at my house as at myself sleeping, and had the joy of being in a profound slumber and simultaneously of keeping vigilant guard over myself" (*Complete*, 334). This sentence reminds me of the following passage in *The Castle*:

Looking at the castle, K. felt at times as if he was watching a person who was sitting there quietly, staring straight ahead, not so much lost in thought and hence cut off from everything as free and unconcerned; as if the person had been alone, with no one watching him, he must be aware that he was being watched, but it did not affect his calm in the least and in fact – there was no telling whether this was the cause or effect – the watcher's gaze found no purchase and kept sliding away. (89)

Kafka blurs the boundary between the observed and the observer, the pursued and the pursuer, and the external and the internal. The fact that the guard and the guarded cannot coexist translates into a voluntary *mise-en-abyme*, which ensures that the true understanding of self remains forever elusive. In the same essay, Henel suggests that Kafka is simultaneously carrying out kind of self-psychoanalysis through writing fiction. I would point out that such self-analysis is more limiting than illuminating since the self under analysis should be dormant and inactive. Consequently, "the watcher's gaze" will only "[keep] sliding away." Instead of self-psychoanalysis, I think that Kafka is portraying the inaccessibility of self through its doubling. The search for self becomes a journey in search for the impenetrable truth or center of a self-labyrinth.

In the end, Kafka exploits the concept of labyrinth to ask a question: can true self-analysis be carried out by the power of reason? Can Daedalus learn about himself by exploring his own labyrinth? Is what we learn in life through the faculty of reason anything more than the fact that we as human beings are imperfect, illogical, and at times even cruel?

## Auster the *Flâneur*

Stefano Tani, in his book *The Doomed Detective*,<sup>1</sup> defines the antidetective fiction as one that takes conventions of detective novel to successfully invert it. Whereas the traditional detective fiction features “the” answer to the case, to which an ingenious detective guides the reader, the antidetective fiction denies one or any answer. *The New York Trilogy* by Paul Auster, now considered to be anti- or meta-detective or even a metaphysical detective novel, presents the chaos of modern existence in the conventional setting of detective story. The effect is the superimposition of reality and fiction, and the birth of metafiction. Thus another textual labyrinth arises in which many paths are possible and implied but never confirmed. In fact, the wandering and speculation becomes more important than the actual case or labyrinth as James Peacock describes in the following passage:

To declare “we know nothing” is not simply to mock the reader, but to draw attention to the fact that these antidetective texts are predominantly about the process of reading, rather than a single explanation, and that multiple interpretations are always possible.<sup>2</sup> (44)

### City of Glass

*The New York Trilogy* consists of three volumes which were published sequentially: *City of Glass* (1985), *Ghosts* (1986) and *The Locked Room* (1986). All three stories take place in New York City, as the title suggests. Of the three, however, *City of Glass* engages with minute details of the physical landscape the most.

Daniel Quinn, the protagonist of *City of Glass*, is characterized as an exemplary *flâneur*: “More than anything else...what he liked to do was walk...never going anywhere, but simply going wherever his legs happened to take him.”<sup>3</sup> (3-4) Having lost his wife and son in an accident, Quinn has withdrawn into a voluntary exile. *Flânerie*, to plunge into the

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<sup>1</sup> Tani, Stefano. *The Doomed Detective: The Contribution of the Detective Novel to Postmodern American and Italian Fiction*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984. Print.

<sup>2</sup> Peacock, James. *Understanding Paul Auster*. Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2010. Print.

<sup>3</sup> Auster, Paul. *The New York Trilogy*. London: Penguin Books, 1986. Print. Referred to simply as NYT.

city and become a “man of the crowd,” allows Quinn to distance himself from his memories and to disappear:

New York was an inexhaustible space, a labyrinth of endless steps, and no matter how far he walked... it always left him with the feeling of being lost. Lost, not only in the city, but within himself as well. Each time he took a walk, he felt as though he were leaving himself behind, and...by reducing himself to a seeing eye, he was able to escape the obligation to think, and this, more than anything else, brought him a measure of peace, a salutary emptiness within...By wandering aimlessly, all places became equal, and it no longer mattered where he was. On his best walks, he was able to feel that he was nowhere. And this, finally, was all he ever asked of things: to be nowhere. New York was the nowhere he had built around himself, and he realized that he had no intention of ever leaving it again. (4)

Through the act of *flânerie*, Quinn gains the “salutary emptiness,” void of thoughts that define him and free of place that pins him down to himself. The emptying of self brings death and rebirth with which Kern identifies the journey in a labyrinth.<sup>4</sup> Reborn as a wanderer, navigating through the space aimlessly but choosing all the while his own path among numerous possibilities, Quinn finds a gigantic labyrinth in the city. In fact, the desire to be “nowhere” can be realized *only* in a labyrinth, in which one’s position in relation to its center or the outside *cannot* be known. As the *flânerie* transforms the city into a labyrinth, so the *flâneur* also becomes the labyrinth’s creator: “New York was nowhere he built around himself.” Quinn, who has “no intention of ever leaving it again,” thus corresponds to Daedalus who imprisons himself in his own creation. As noted earlier, such self-imposed exile in the city is enabled by merging the crowd with the cityscape. The lack of individuality of the shapeless multitude opposes the *flâneur*, whose identity is confirmed by the very act of *flânerie*. Yet the *flâneur* himself is just one more anonymous passerby to everyone else. Whereas the classical wanderer is defined by his solitude, the *flâneur* is defined by the juxtaposition of self-knowledge and anonymity in the middle of the city’s crowd. Despite its obvious threat to individuality, anonymity serves to protect a private internal space that enables idiosyncrasy and self-reflection.

To protect his anonymity, Daniel Quinn uses William Wilson as a penname, taken from 1839 Poe’s story about a *Doppelgänger*. Even though William Wilson was “an invention...born within Quinn himself...he never went so far as to believe that he and

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<sup>4</sup> See p. 5.

William Wilson was the same man” (5). The clear distinction between the two identities allows Quinn to remain a *flâneur* and Wilson a writer. But then this intentional balance between real and unreal is disrupted by the phone call that begins the novel: “It was a wrong number that started it, the telephone ringing three times in the dead of night, and the voice on the other end asking for someone he was not” (3). The inquiry for “[t]he one who calls himself Paul Auster” (12) undermines the protection of Quinn’s anonymity and presents a chance to take yet another pseudonym. The phone call thus penetrates the boundary between self and others, known and unknown, fiction and reality, and begins the renewed reality of the labyrinth. Kafka assigns telephones a similar function in both *The Castle* (the silent phones in the Castle that any officer may pick up for a diversion) and *The Trial* (the Court’s summon to the hearing and Leni’s warning): an intrusion of alternative reality. Quinn is sharply aware of this aspect of telephones: “The telephone was not his favorite object...What he disliked most of all was its tyranny. Not only did it have the power to interrupt him against his will, but inevitably he would give in to its command” (11). The phone call ultimately translates into an intellectual challenge to Quinn/Wilson the writer, to break the balance between Quinn and Wilson and to test himself out in the fictional reality of detective stories. The challenge is also an invitation to the new labyrinth of *City of Glass*, in which Quinn can shed the identity of creator to become a true *flâneur*.

Thus Quinn/Wilson yields to Auster the detective. Given that Paul Auster’s *New York Trilogy* was originally classified as a detective story, and that Quinn writes detective stories under the name of Wilson, the genre forms another connection between Auster and Quinn. The protagonist describes the genre as follows:

In the good mystery there is nothing wasted, no sentence, no word that is not significant. And even if it is not significant, it has the potential to be so—which amounts to the same thing...Since everything seen or said, even the slightest, most trivial thing, can bear a connection to the outcome of the story, nothing must be overlooked. Everything becomes essence; the center of the book shifts with each event that propels it forward. The center then, is everywhere, and no circumference can be drawn until the book has come to its end.  
(9)

Since nothing is unnecessary or insignificant, a detective story becomes a collection of signs waiting to be interpreted. In this textual realm, a wanderer who observes naturally

becomes a detective, which is exactly what Quinn does. But the superposition of a textual labyrinth on a physical one proves to be devastating. Whereas the traditional genre represents order, perfection and enclosure, the “real” life case of Quinn/Auster only presents the chaos and meaninglessness of the city-labyrinth and of life. Quinn first realizes the difference at Grand Central Station. Having accepted the job of observing Peter Stillman Sr., recently released and a potential threat to Peter Stillman Jr., Quinn looks for Peter Stillman Sr. in the bustling place. But he finds two Stillmans instead of one, with the exact same physical features but with different attires and attitudes. “There was nothing he could do now that would not be a mistake. Whatever choice he made—and he had to make a choice—would be arbitrary, a submission to chance” (68). This first encounter of forking paths in the labyrinth reminds Quinn that by becoming a detective, he is deprived of the omniscient authority of the writer. He also loses the aimlessness of a *flâneur*, because as a detective, Quinn/Auster has a clear aim: solving the case. Even when Stillman roams around the city exactly the way Quinn used to, tailing Stillman no longer establishes Quinn’s identity as a *flâneur*: “Wandering...was a kind of mindlessness. But following Stillman was not wandering...[f]or he was obliged now to concentrate on what [Stillman] is doing, even if it was next to nothing” (72-73). From his previous status of a *voyeur*, with a bird’s-eye view of the creator, Quinn has now come down to the ground level of a *marcheur*. Reduced to a reader-wanderer of the textual labyrinth, Quinn exhibits the creator’s amnesia and becomes Daedalus who forgot the way out of the Labyrinth.

The detective’s work is to find an order in the given chaos. However, because of the labyrinth’s perpetual incomprehensibility, the detective-wanderer can never know for sure whether he is discovering the order or creating one. Quinn constantly struggles “in search of the thought, the idea that will pull all these things together and make sense of them” (9). Yet when Stillman’s wandering appears to lack any meaning, Quinn quickly detects the danger of invention instead of observation:

It seemed to him that he was looking for a sign...[H]e continued to disbelieve the arbitrariness of Stillman's actions. This, in itself, was unacceptable. For it meant that Quinn was allowing himself to deny the facts, and this, as he well knew, was the worst thing a detective could do. (83)

The possibility of creation evokes the figure of writer whose order is his language: “the writer and the detective are interchangeable” (9). The inseparable bond between investigation and writing is exhibited in the regularly written reports, and also in the triple meaning of the word “private eye”: the letter “i,” standing for “investigator”; “I” in the upper case; and lastly, “the physical eye of the writer, the eye of the man who looks out from himself into the world and demands that the world reveal itself to him” (9-10).

Auster employs the story of Tower of Babel to demonstrate juxtaposition and confusion between order and chaos and to further emphasize the role of language. Stillman publishes a book on the reinterpretation of the story and, obsessed with the search for prelapsarian<sup>5</sup> language, goes so far as to imprison his infant son in a dark room for nine years to find out what language he may come up with. When Quinn tracks Stillman’s meandering on the map to grasp its meaning, he realizes that Stillman is *writing* with his walks. Quinn identifies the letters “OWEROFBAB” and, having read Stillman’s book, realizes that the “inescapable” answer was “THE TOWER OF BABEL” (85). Though the answer may be obvious, Quinn questions its validity since Stillman is not writing the message down to deliver it to someone. The words exist in Quinn’s red notebook, and only there. The fact that Quinn “had seen [the letters] only because he wanted to see them” (86) leads him to question, again, the distinction between observation and creation.

Now convinced that Stillman is not a threat to his son and driven by curiosity, Quinn engages Stillman in a conversation. Stillman tells Quinn that Adam’s “words had not been merely appended to the things he saw, they had revealed their essences” and that “[t]he story of the Garden, therefore, records not only the fall of man, but the fall of language” (52). What Stillman envisions is the possibility of recreating prelapsarian language by naming the random objects he picks up during his walks:

If the fall of man also entailed a fall of language, was it not logical to assume that it would be possible to undo the fall, to reverse its effects by undoing the fall of language, by striving to recreate the language that was spoken in Eden? (57)

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<sup>5</sup> Prelapsarian (*lapsus* in Latin means “fall”) means before the Fall of man or expulsion from paradise.



Stillman's ideal of prelapsarian language corresponds to "the" language that reveals the order of the language-labyrinth. Stillman consequently comes to New York where the fall is complete—"the most forlorn of places, the most abject. The brokenness is everywhere, the disarray is universal" (94), in order to restore the order. But Stillman does not give any clues about the language to Quinn, and only declares that "[i]t will be the most important event in the history of mankind" (95). It is almost unsettling that Stillman Sr. sounds so similar to Stillman Jr., whom Quinn encounters earlier:

I am mostly now a poet...I make up my words myself, just like when I lived in the dark. I begin to remember things that way, to pretend I am back in the dark again. I am the only one who knows what the words mean. They cannot be translated. (22)

Stillman Jr. also believes that "[t]hese poems will make [him] famous" and that they will be "[s]o beautiful the whole world will weep" (22). The sublime order of prelapsarian language is therefore characterized by inaccessibility, in both Stillman Sr.'s language and Stillman Jr.'s poetry. At the same time, though both strive for the language remembered, what they are accomplishing, little by little, is getting closer to the language created. Again the confusion between wanderer and creator governs the impenetrable labyrinth.

Quinn talks to Stillman three times—like the three stories, three rings, and three many other things in this trilogy—under three different names: Quinn, Henry Dark and Peter Stillman. Quinn uses his real name as a pseudonym at first because he is now supposed to be Auster. Stillman remarks that it rhymes with twin and says, "I like your name enormously, Mr. Quinn. It flies off in so many little directions at once" (90), as *Landvermesser* did.<sup>6</sup> One word as a point of departure for multiple meanings resembles the forking paths of the labyrinth. The second time, Quinn uses the name of Henry Dark, a scholar Stillman writes about in his book. Stillman tells him that Dark was his own invention (97) after the initial of Humpty Dumpty, the egg in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, which in turn reminds the reader of the title *City of Glass*. On the last occasion, Quinn pretends to be Stillman Jr. Every time, Stillman seems not to recognize Quinn, allowing him to engage in a polynymity that started with the pseudonym of "Paul

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<sup>6</sup> See pp. 21.



Auster.” The series of names recall the characters K. engaged with as different possibilities of wanderings in Kafka’s fiction. Yet names are but words and thus ghosts of actual people/characters. Especially to a creator/writer like Quinn, they are malleable extensions of reality that he commends. However, as the novel progresses, the polynymity takes its toll on Quinn: a hint that Quinn himself may be but a pseudonym or a fictional character in a labyrinth of which he is not the author.

After the last encounter, Stillman disappears. In want of ideas, Quinn looks for the real Paul Auster. But the only Paul Auster in the phone book turns out to be a writer instead of a private detective. Quinn is recognized by Auster as a fellow writer since Auster has read Quinn’s poetry, *Unfinished Business*, published in his real name. Auster introduces his own work, as the fourth figure of writer in *City of Glass* succeeding Quinn/Wilson, Stillman Jr. and Stillman Sr. Auster reimagines *Don Quixote* as “an experiment...to test the gullibility of his fellow men” (119). Don Quixote—who has same initials with Daniel Quinn—in fact “orchestrated the whole thing himself” (119) simply “to be amused” (120) according to Auster. Quinn cannot describe why he is disturbed, though the reader can guess: the case of Stillman may be someone’s idea of a joke, as if Quinn were a character in a fiction, created for nothing more than amusement (which he *is*!). Before he gets a chance to explain the feeling, however, Auster’s son and wife return home. What Quinn sees in them is all he has lost: Auster’s son who is also named Daniel (the name of the author’s real son is Daniel Auster) and his beautiful wife, Siri (like the author’s real second wife). Quickly, Quinn leaves.

The next chapter begins with the following passage:

Quinn was nowhere now. He had nothing, he knew nothing, he knew that he knew nothing. Not only had he been sent back to the beginning, he was now before the beginning, and so far before the beginning that it was worse than any end he could imagine. (124)

The safe anonymity has devolved into the polynymity in which nothing seems to be his real name. The father-son relationship of the Stillmans appears more like a doubling and both disappear. The fact that Auster’s son is named Daniel also implies that Auster the writer is the father of Quinn the character. The doublings and opposites are forking paths of the

labyrinth that Quinn can take in search of the order in the apparent chaos. But the confusion between the two that renders them essentially interchangeable confirms the arbitrariness of Quinn's wandering. It was Quinn's choice to take Auster as another pseudonym. But the fact that the name was not his own creation led him into the detective story of which he is not the writer but a powerless character: *City of Glass*. Whereas he used to be a contented *flâneur*, longing to be nowhere, Quinn now realizes what it truly means to be nowhere. Quinn reinterprets the quote from Baudelaire—"It seems to me that I will always be happy in the place where I am not"<sup>7</sup>—as "[w]herever I am not is the place where I am myself," which finally comes to mean "[a]nywhere out of the world" (132). The safety Quinn used to enjoy in the metropolitan city is lost, as is his identity of writer. In fact, when he goes back to his apartment, Quinn finds it newly furnished with another resident, who coldly laughs at his insistence that he is the writer who used to live there: "A writer? That's the funniest thing I ever heard" (149). The degeneration of identity is complete.

When Quinn obsessively continues to write in the red notebook, his life is ultimately reduced to the notebook itself:

He wanted to go on writing about it, and it pained him to know that this would not be possible. Nevertheless, he tried to face the end of the red notebook with courage...The last sentence of the red notebook reads: "What will happen when there are no more pages in the red notebook?" (156-157)

Whereas his identity was defined by the act of writing at the beginning of the story, it now appears as if Quinn can go on living so long as he can write. This metafictional element is reiterated and reinforced at the end of the story, where the reader learns that *City of Glass* was a rewritten version of Quinn's red notebook, with a narrator who turns out to be Auster's friend. Thus the confusion between the writer and the written creates textual prison and labyrinth whose order is inaccessible since one cannot know which came first, the creator or the character, or even who is who.

The confusion of identity refutes the traditional celebration of the protagonist's genius that distinguishes him or her as extraordinary. In addition, it successfully blurs the

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<sup>7</sup> « Il me semble que je serais toujours bien là où je ne suis pas. » A quote from « N'importe où hors du monde », *Le spleen de Paris* (1869).

distinction between the criminal and the detective, the pursuer and the pursued, and the observer and the observed. Dennis Barone opposes the conventional “movement backward in time, from the corpse to the crime” of detective fiction with Quinn’s “pursuit of paternal authority associated with creation and also a quest for his own identity.”<sup>8</sup> (73) When the possibility of Quinn’s fictionality emerges, linear time is challenged. As a result, whereas Quinn actively distanced himself from his memory before, now he tries to remember his past self without success: “He tried to think about the life he had lived before the story began. This caused him many difficulties, for it seemed so remote to him now” (*NYT*, 153). As Stillman “had become part of the city...a speck, a punctuation mark, a brick in an endless wall of bricks” (108), so Quinn dissolves into the fiction. The self-annihilation is complete, but the text lingers so that the narrator “I” can reconstruct it and deliver it. Quinn as the writer was interested in the intertextual realm for “[w]hat interested [Quinn] about the stories he wrote was not their relation to the world but their relation to other stories” (8). But when he plunges into the fictional labyrinth, Quinn becomes no more than a word, and his life no more than a string of words like steps inside a labyrinth.

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<sup>8</sup> Barone, Dennis, ed. *Beyond the Red Notebook: Essays on Paul Auster*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995. Print.

## Ghosts

The title *City of Glass* emphasizes the transparency and frailty of any identity in modern world, as Norma Rowen describes: “In the Babel of New York, things stream across the eye in a series of disconnected atoms, and subject and object blur each other’s image until we feel trapped in a universe of mirrors, a city of glass indeed.”<sup>9</sup> (232) Given the allusion to Humpty Dumpty and *Through the Looking Glass*, the reference to the looking glass is also unmistakable. A mirror reflects an identity by doubling the image. As long as both look at each other, one cannot tell which one is real. Auster plays with identities by engaging with the glass layer between fiction and reality. The transparent layer’s existence is neglected until it is irrevocably shattered, which happens when Quinn takes on one more pseudonym to begin the degeneration of any identity that he used to have.

Alison Russell, on the other hand, remarks that the title is also “a play on Augustine’s *The City of God*, a neoplatonic treatise that suggests that an eternal order exists outside the realm of sense.”<sup>10</sup> (72) Her commentary reminds me of Quinn’s struggle to find an order within the chaos and Stillman’s efforts to create a new pattern from the disarray. Neither could reach his goal, since the labyrinth of the antidetective fiction defies an answer. As a result, multiple speculations naturally arise. Auster, in a passage of *Ghosts*, underscores the association between visual observation and mental speculation via the etymology of “speculate”:

To speculate, from the Latin *speculatus*, meaning to spy out, to observe, and linked to the word *speculum*, meaning mirror or looking glass. For in spying out at Black across the street, it is as though Blue were looking into a mirror, and instead of merely watching another, he finds that he is also watching himself. (*NYT*, 171-172)

Once the glass has shattered, two images staring at each other become shapeless, immaterial and superficial: thus the following volume’s title, *Ghosts*. If the glass shatters but the images linger, they are no longer necessarily indicative of each other. But their independence casts doubts on the true nature of “self” which seems to have been defined

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<sup>9</sup> Rowen, Norma. “The Detective in Search of the Lost Tongue of Adam: Paul Auster’s *City of Glass*.” *Critique* 32.4 (Summer, 1991). Print. pp. 224-234.

<sup>10</sup> Russell, Alison. “Deconstructing *The New York Trilogy*: Paul Auster’s Anti-Detective Fiction.” *Critique* 31.2 (Winter, 1990). Print. pp. 71-84.

only in relation to the other; or is self-“reflection” ever possible? Would we ever know for sure, since we cannot observe ourselves without doubling ourselves? As Alice walks into the looking glass to explore the alternate reality, so we follow the traces Quinn has left in his red notebook to plunge into another fictional reality, of Blue lost between Black-and-White.

Befitting the title, the narrator of *Ghosts* begins by denying the verisimilitude of characters’ identity. All of them only have surnames, all of which are colors: “First of all there is Blue. Later there is White, and then there is Black, and before the beginning there is Brown” (161). The following statement, that “[t]he place is New York, the time is present, and neither one will ever change” (161), assigns both spatial specificity and generality to New York, the “inexhaustible space” (4), which effectively becomes a symbol of the entire world. Just as we are confined to the “present” forever, so New York embraces and imprisons all modern existence in *The New York Trilogy*. The physical fixedness of New York parallels the “fixedness” of the present in the flow of time. As a result, the location within New York invariably embodies arbitrariness, as if determined by the narrator’s whim: “The address is unimportant. But let’s say Brooklyn Heights, for the sake of argument. Some quiet, rarely traveled street not far from the bridge—Orange Street perhaps” (163).

The gist of Blue’s case is simple: “White wants Blue to follow a man named Black and to keep an eye on him for as long as necessary” (161). When Blue first observes Black’s behavior from the apartment across the street from Black’s, Black is writing. Then Blue writes, in his own notebook: “Black writing at his desk” (164). Feeling as if Black is looking at him, Blue ducks, only to realize that Black’s gaze was but “a blank stare, signifying thought rather than seeing, a look that makes things invisible, that does not let them in” (164). It is as though Black could “see” Blue not by looking at Blue but by *thinking* of Blue, as if Blue were a creation of Black’s writing. From his window, Blue cannot read what Black is writing, establishing the text labyrinth, whose meaning is impenetrable and inaccessible. In addition, Black is a color that can hold any number of other colors and still not show them; whereas White does not offer any explanation of the case, like a blank page to be

written on. With nothing else to do but watch Black, whose activities are extremely simple and nondescript, Blue imagines numerous stories behind the case.

As the days go on, Blue realizes there is no end to the stories he can tell. For Black is no more than a kind of blankness, a hole in the texture of things, and one story can fill this hole as well as any other. (173)

Thus White invites invention and Black defies clarification. It is interesting to remember that “[e]verything about Peter Stillman [Jr.] was white” (17) and that “[t]he effect was almost transparent” (18). In fact, Stillman Jr. even says that “[i]n the winter I am Mr. White, in the summer I am Mr. Green” (21). But as opposed to the transparency of Peter Stillman Jr., White in *Ghosts* appears “as though covered with powder” (162), and later wears a ludicrous mask.

This entrance to the labyrinth, to become the writer figure speculating stories of Black, necessitates the departure from the pre-labyrinth existence, similar to Quinn’s self-imposed retreat. For Blue, the effect was to sever his former social relations, represented by one with his fiancée. This divergence from the past, however, does not follow a conscious and active resolution, as was the case with Quinn, but simply arrives and defies Blue’s resistance. Even when Blue longs to call his fiancée, he somehow cannot: “he cannot remember a time in his life when he has been so reluctant to do a thing he so clearly wants to do. I’m changing, he says to himself. Little by little, I’m no longer the same” (173-174).

Whereas Quinn was a writer-turned-detective, Blue is a detective who becomes a reader and later, a writer. Blue’s language as a detective used to simply report facts, so that “[w]ords are transparent for him, great windows that stand between him and the world, and until now they have never impeded his view, have never even seemed to be there” (174). As Quinn senses the danger of inventing a case instead of investigating one, so Blue has to fight the urge to create a case in the face of nothingness. Blue has to remind himself that he is supposed to be writing about Black and not himself. However, the thought “looms as a perverse temptation, and Blue must struggle with himself for some time before fighting it off” (175).

Later, Blue follows Black into a bookstore and comes across with a copy of *Walden*. Finding that the publisher is “Walter J. Black,” Blue decides to buy the book. “If he can’t read what Black writes, at least he can read what he reads” (181) is the reasoning, even though Blue admits that this may not be the same Black. What Blue finds, or does not find, in *Walden* resembles what the reader of *Ghosts* seeks and fails: a plot, or *the* plot of the traditional genre of detective fiction. Blue “feels like a man who has been condemned to sit in a room and go on reading a book for the rest of his life” since *Walden* “offers him nothing, since “[t]here is no story, no plot, no action—nothing but a man sitting alone in a room and writing a book” (202). His description of *Walden* sounds strikingly like the summary of *Ghosts* thus Blue becomes identified with the figure of the reader. What Blue does not realize is that the window between Black and Blue, or the layer between Blue’s reality and textual reality of *Walden*, is but a looking glass.

The narrator “I” appears only at the end of *Ghosts*, just as in *City of Glass*. The narrator lacks the characterization that his predecessor in *City of Glass* has, as a friend of Auster the character. Yet he certainly does not lack voice, as previously demonstrated in his determination of spatial and temporal settings of the story, and freely interjects opinions to create another level of doubling of the writer figure. In the following passage, the narrator comments on Blue the reader who gives up understanding *Walden*:

What he does not know is that were he to find the patience to read the book in the spirit it asks to be read, his entire life would begin to change, and little by little he would come to a full understanding of his situation...But lost chances are as much a part of life as chances taken, and a story cannot dwell on what might have been...Little does he realize that this is the beginning of the end. For something is about to happen, and once it happens, nothing will ever be the same again. (194)

Again, the text represents a repository of truth, in this case, of self-discovery and life. If Blue can successfully become the figure of reader, and finish reading *Ghosts*, he will be able to learn his fate in advance, toppling down the dramatic irony the narrator produces. However, the comprehension is denied to Blue as well as to the reader. Blue’s efforts in becoming a reader and writer demonstrate his wanderings, following different paths of identity in order to comprehend the truth of the labyrinth.

What Blue does, after giving up on understanding *Walden*, is to get away from Black and to reestablish his identity without the haunting image of Black. Blue also tries to approach the truth through the figure of White. Blue wonders whether Black was also hired by White to observe Blue, which “would make White the real writer then—and Black no more than his stand-in, a fake, an actor with no substance of his own” (203). Thus we have the three men in mirror image: White-Black-Blue. Russell notes that *Ghosts* is both “a self-enclosed structure of self-mirrorings” and “a mirror image, in some ways, of the first and third volumes of *The New York Trilogy*” (77). The middle volume capitalizes on the metaphor to construct a mirroring primarily between Blue and Black, a doubling that can multiply itself infinitely for an infinite number of times, so long as the two continue to observe and speculate. The figure of the looking glass in the context of the labyrinth also bridges the internal reflection and external observation of a wanderer, which further confuses the distinction between *Doppelgängers*. At the same time, the doubling-multiplying reminds us of the dualism of Wilson and Quinn before its degeneration into polynymity. Blue dismisses the thought that “the only logical explanation is that Black is not one man but several” as soon as it occurs for being too “monstrous” (*NYT*, 203), since it points to the possibility of his own self-annihilation.

When Blue feels that he cannot go on, he finally moves to act. Under disguises, Blue interacts with Black for three times, just as in *City of Glass*, not counting the climactic conflict. In their conversations, Black repeats what Blue has been thinking and what the reader has been reading, enhancing the doubling-identification between Blue and Black. Black also describes writing as the act that essentially renders one a ghost, when Blue has only just now become the figure of the writer by departing from what was assigned to him as a case by White and by developing schemes and plots to interact with Black:

Writing is a solitary business. It takes over your life. In some sense, a writer has no life of his own. Even when he's there, he's not really there.

Another ghost.

Exactly. (209)

Whereas the invention of language signifies the transcendence of chaotic existence in *City of Glass*, in *Ghosts* writing is presented as an exhaustive process that takes a toll on one's real life. In other words, to write is to create a textual self at the expense of the physical self.



The disappearance of most characters in the first volume characterizes the textual realm as a black hole that can destroy numerous identities. This unruly power of the text is finally associated with the idea of fate. Quinn's contemplation of fate in *City of Glass* is as follows:

Fate in the sense of what was, of what happened to be. It was something like the word "it" in the phrase "it is raining" or "it is night." What that "it" referred to Quinn had never known. A generalized condition of things as they were perhaps; the state of is-ness that was the ground on which the happenings of the world took place. (132-133)

The linguistic and grammatical discussion of fate emphasizes "a generalized condition of things" through language. "It" defies understanding but can be followed by any "is-ness" to define "it" in the textual world, or the text-world. On the other hand, in *Ghosts*, Blue experiences the helplessness of characters in front of the authoritative author, as Quinn did, like a wanderer thrown into a foreign reality of labyrinth. What is written is immutable and final, as are the walls that construct a labyrinth, as the priest pointed out to K. in *The Trial*. If something happens in a book, "it goes on happening forever. It can never be changed, can never be otherwise" (193). Thus as opposed to the shapeless vastness of the city-labyrinth of the first story, here the reader encounters the insurmountable walls of the text-labyrinth. To ensure the reality or the purpose of his existence, Blue *has* to comprehend the writings of Black. It also is to shatter the glass between the two and check the physicality of Black beneath his image. Pondering on the necessity and gravity of breaking into Black's apartment, Blue thinks that "[t]his is what the ancients called fate, and every hero must submit to it. There is no choice, and if there is anything to be done, it is only the one thing that leaves no choice" (222). The moment he walks in, Blue experiences a "black"out. What he smuggles out from Black's apartment, however, turns out to be his own weekly reports to White.

Thus Blue is suggested as the ultimate writer among the three: "[t]he drama is Blue's alone." Ironically, Blue learns this by submitting to be a character, the hero of conventional fiction who admits his fate as written. What he learns also completes Black as his *Doppelgänger* so that Blue "can no longer accept Black's existence" (226). In their last encounter, Black wears a mask, which was what Blue was doing all along when interacting with Black. Blue demands "the story" of Black, which should distinguish Black from Blue, so that they can finally say good-bye. Black replies, "You know it already, Blue. Don't you

understand that? You know the story by heart” (230). Blue finishes the scene by a violent struggle with Black and carries Black’s manuscript to his apartment to read, without checking to see if Black is dead or alive. When Blue finally reads the manuscript, he realizes that Black was right: he “knew it all by heart” (232). The narrator interferes to say that “the story is not yet over...until Blue leaves the room” which highlights the multiple layers of *mise-en-abyme* of *Ghosts*. Blue wishes to know Black’s story, only to discover that the boundary between Black and Blue, the external and the internal, the observed and the observer does not exist, since “[t]o enter Black...was the equivalent of entering himself, and once inside himself, he can no longer conceive of being anywhere else” (226). The reader of *Ghosts* is again denied access to “the” story which is Black’s story. But just as “[a]nything is possible” for Blue after this story (232), the interpretations of *Ghosts* can be numerous. Quinn’s “blue” book of poetry was titled *Unfinished Business*. Thus it is the reader’s part in turn to see whether Blue’s story is the reader’s story, one that the reader has known all along or not, after having read *City of Glass*, or even before beginning to read *City of Glass*. Thus the multiplicity of wanderings is confirmed, whereas the impenetrability of this textual labyrinth ensures that none among them leads anywhere. Aptly, the last sentence of *Ghosts* is, “And from this moment on, we know nothing” (232).

## The Locked Room

Quinn is a writer-turned-detective. Blue is a detective-turned-reader-and-writer. The nameless protagonist of the last volume of *The New York Trilogy* is a critic-turned-detective. In a textual labyrinth, the critic is “the” wanderer who resembles the detective of the traditional genre. The protagonist, in addition to his occupation, exhibits the details of his private life, past and present alike, and vividly describes his travels to various places. The nameless protagonist thus becomes the most realistic and full-fledged character in the entire *New York Trilogy*. However, the degeneration of identity is complete: from a name, to a color, and finally, to anonymity. The *City of Glass* has shattered. The *Ghosts* filled up the vast emptiness. Whereas the previous titles lack the article, the last story is “the” locked room. The specificity enhances the expectation that the locked room may be opened to finally reveal “the” story, because in a detective fiction, the real answer is never uncovered

until the very last moment. Russell also notes that “*The Locked Room* takes its title from a popular motif of detective novels: a murdered body is discovered in a sealed room, the exits of which have been locked from the inside” (79). However, the reader will do better to remember that the fate is defined as “is-ness” in this antidetective fiction. The locked room, therefore, will remain locked and stay true to what is written. Whereas Pandora’s box was locked to be opened and Chekhov’s gun presented to be fired, Auster’s room firmly remains at the inaccessible center of the labyrinth. The reader-wanderer cannot help keep searching with the hope of reaching, without knowing how.

*The Locked Room* begins with the disappearance of the protagonist’s childhood friend, Fanshawe, whom he has not seen for years. His beautiful wife Sophie has waited long enough to give birth to his son before contacting the protagonist. Before his disappearance, Fanshawe has told her that if anything should happen to him, the protagonist is the only one he could trust with his manuscripts and that it was for the protagonist to decide whether or not to publish it. The writing of Fanshawe embodies the life of the writer and the two suitcases containing the manuscripts are described to be “as heavy as a man” (246). Thus the significance of the choice between publishing and burying the text weighs heavily on the protagonist:

There was no difference in my mind between giving the order to destroy Fanshawe’s work and killing him with my own hands. I had been given the power to obliterate, to steal a body from its grave and tear it to pieces. (262)

The protagonist, as a literary critic, is the patient and attentive reader that Blue could never be and decides to publish the admirable work of Fanshawe. It is interesting to note that *Fanshawe* is the title of Hawthorne’s first novel. When the book was not successful, Hawthorne is said to have burned the remaining copies. The gesture reminds us of Fanshawe’s instruction to Sophie, that she should destroy his work if should it be evaluated as unworthy of publication, as well as of Kafka’s, to burn all his manuscripts, which, fortunately for us, his friend Max Brod disregarded. Furthermore, Fanshawe in Hawthorne’s novel is the weak intellectual who gives up marrying a girl he loves so that she can marry his friend, just as Fanshawe in *The Locked Room* “lets” the protagonist marry his wife. The parallel between Fanshawe and *Fanshawe* and even Kafka reminds the reader of

the similarity between “Auster” and Auster in *City of Glass*. By treating reality outside the book and the fictional reality of a different book alike, Auster complicates any boundary between anything. At the end of the day, what remains is the text-world-labyrinth with convoluting passages in which a wanderer does not know anymore how to distinguish a story from a reality.

The intertextuality of the three stories of *The New York Trilogy* becomes evident in *The Locked Room* and emerges as the principal theme of the novel. Quinn turns out to be a private detective hired by Sophie to find Fanshawe. Peter Stillman walks into a bar in Paris and the protagonist insists on calling him Fanshawe. In addition to the “ghosts” of characters haunting the third volume, the plots share countless similarities. For example, the protagonist goes through the changes experienced by Quinn and Blue. First of all, the protagonist is not a typical wanderer at the beginning, but later engages in an investigation-*flânerie* similar to Quinn’s. Not to mention the doubling of the protagonist and Fanshawe, like that of Black and Blue: not only did they look so alike when they were little so that their mothers were confused, but also when the protagonist meets Fanshawe’s ex-girlfriend, she mistakes him for Fanshawe for a split second. Furthermore, readers of Fanshawe’s book wonder if it was the protagonist’s work after all. Was not the whole story of Fanshawe pure invention to promote publicity? The notion startles and flatters the protagonist, and finds the idea of writing under a pseudonym attractive, reminding us again of Quinn’s play with William Wilson, Max Work and Paul Auster.

The pivotal moment of the encounter between *Doppelgänger*s serves as the climax in all three stories, as when Quinn consults Auster and when Blue fights Black. In *The Locked Room*, the first contact between the two comes via letter. The mailbox is described as the protagonist’s “hiding place, the one spot in the world that was purely [his] own” (280) and Fanshawe’s letter breaks through the privacy just as the phone call penetrates Quinn’s anonymity in *City of Glass*. It turns out that Fanshawe was not dead after all, only disappeared, just as Stillman, Blue and Quinn have in the previous stories. Fanshawe seems to have constructed his own “nowhere” around him to take refuge. He writes to ask the protagonist to marry Sophie, father his child, but never to find him because if he does, he

will kill him. He concludes the letter by saying, “You are my friend, and my one hope is that you will always be who you are. With me it’s another story. Wish me luck” (281). It is important to remember that the protagonist has always aspired to be a successful writer like Fanshawe and *does not even have a name*. Also, filling up the empty space that Fanshawe has left behind translates into the protagonist’s transformation into Fanshawe. Thus when Fanshawe the writer defines him as his friend, he circumscribes the identity of the protagonist in that word. The text binds him in the “is-ness” fate and bans the possibility of his creating his own fate: in other words, of ever becoming the writer/creator figure.

The following sentence accurately describes what it means to be a character in the text-labyrinth, powerless in front of such tyranny of words: “Stories without endings can do nothing but go on forever, and to be caught in one means that you must die before your part in it is played out” (278). However, the protagonist himself once enjoyed similar prerogatives of creative power in language when he created people instead of taking depositions: “My field work had turned into desk work, and instead of an investigator I was now an inventor” (293). As the writer-creator figure, the protagonist crosses the boundary between fiction and reality through his status of census-taker:

It was not precisely like making up characters in a story, but something grander, something far more unsettling. Everyone knows that stories are imaginary. Whatever effect they might have on us, we know they are not true, even when they tell truths more important than the ones we can find elsewhere. As opposed to the story writer, I was offering my creations directly to the real world, and therefore it seemed possible to me that they could affect this real world in a real way, that they could eventually become a part of the real itself. No writer could ask for more than that. (295)

The power of language that Stillman believed could undo the fall of men. In *The Locked Room*, it has become the power to recreate reality and define lives and fates of character-people in the textual world.

But what is unsettling about *The New York Trilogy*’s text labyrinth is that the predominant intertextuality allows a possibility of multiple creators. Most characters at one point are the figures of the writer in search of “the” text. But in their effort to interpret the text, they never know whether they are creating the text or reading it. This perplexity

reminds us of the wanderer's conviction, of making an independent choice out of free will in every turn in the labyrinth, despite the fact that his ways are essentially confined by the design of the creator. The confusion between wanderer and creator, along with the denial of the linear time in the convention of corpse-to-crime, defies even an attempt to pinpoint one creator. As Don Quixote could have orchestrated the whole affair to be written, so anyone among Quinn, Blue, Stillman or Fanshawe could have been Auster. Or are there multiple labyrinths, repeated endlessly as in the mirrors facing each other? Then who are ghosts—the readers or the characters? Or are we the same? The following is the conversation in *Ghosts* when Black describes the history of Plymouth Church to Blue:

Many great men have gone there, says Black. Abraham Lincoln, Charles Dickens—they all walked down this street and went into the church.

Ghosts.

Yes, there are ghosts all around us. (207)

But we have to remember that one thing remains unquestioned, though the nature of conventional wandering and detective work invariably is at odds with it: the impenetrability and incomprehensibility of the labyrinth: "The point being that, in the end, each life is irreducible to anything other than itself. Which is as much as to say: lives make no sense" (298).

The protagonist is later commissioned to write the biography of Fanshawe: "the Fanshawe myth explained...the true story at last" (289). Writing the biography of the disappeared man involves reconstructing a man from all the traces he left, in words and in deeds recorded in words. While tracing Fanshawe's life, the protagonist realizes his desire to find and confront Fanshawe, which transforms him into a detective. Thus the corpse-to-case backward motion in time of the traditional detective genre is imitated in the words-to-writer search in *The Locked Room*. However, the protagonist faces a vast labyrinth of texts, "as large as the world itself" (332). Life is spontaneous wandering in a world-labyrinth, but each turn and word can induce a butterfly effect: "A life touches one life, which in turn touches another life, and very quickly the links are innumerable, beyond calculation" (332). The protagonist-detective searches the center of the labyrinth made of words related to Fanshawe's life. At its center, the one figure—the Daedalus of his life-labyrinth—should be

sitting and waiting: Fanshawe. But the nature of the labyrinth obstructs the protagonist from getting any nearer to Fanshawe, just as the road to the Castle impeded K. from getting there. “Faced with a million bits of random information, led down a million paths of false inquiry, I had to find the one path that would take me where I wanted to go. So far, the essential fact was that I hadn’t found it” (332).

The spatial dimension in text contributes to building the image of wandering in a text-labyrinth. The title *The Locked Room* immediately suggests a space as well as the title of Fanshawe’s novel, *Neverland*. The protagonist also metaphorically describes the writing as a space: “The book could do the work itself, and I saw no reason to deny him the pleasure of entering it cold: with no map, no compass, no one to lead him by the hand” (270). In addition, Fanshawe himself is introduced as a space: “He is the place where everything begins for me” (236). The parallel between space, text, and person allows any of the three to become the background and the material of a labyrinth. Lost in search of Fanshawe and losing himself on the way, the protagonist demonstrates that finding a way to the essence of a person—his thought, identity and history—effectively becomes *the* labyrinth of the final volume.

*The New York Trilogy* is thus a labyrinth made of stories in search of “the” story. But the story embodies a person the same way in which a pseudonym designates an identity for Quinn, and a disguise produces appearance and attitude for Blue during his field work. The inaccessibility of the Other is demonstrated in the following passage on the protagonist’s childhood memory of Fanshawe:

He was there for you, and yet at the same time he was inaccessible. You felt there was a secret core in him that could never be penetrated, a mysterious center of hiddenness. To imitate him was somehow to participate in that mystery, but it was also to understand that you could never really know him. (248)

Whereas in the typical detective fiction, the wanderer-detective-reader plunges in with the hope of finding the core as Quinn did, to wander in the antidetective fiction means to acknowledge the incomprehensibility of external observation, which in turn allows a space for internal interrogation. Yet the protagonist, anonymous and the double of Fanshawe,



realizes that such lack of independent identity translates into the incomprehensibility of *self*:

We exist for ourselves, perhaps, and at times, we even have a glimmer of who we are, but in the end, we can never be sure, and as our lives go on, we become more and more opaque to ourselves, more and more aware of our own incoherence. No one can cross the boundary into another—for the simple reason that no one can gain access to himself. (292)

After months of searching in various places and interviewing people Fanshawe had known, the protagonist becomes aimless, hopeless, and incongruent. At a bar in Paris, the protagonist assigns the name of Fanshawe to a random stranger, who turns out to be Peter Stillman, and has a physically violent confrontation with him, which resembles the one between Black and Blue. Lost in the endlessness of textual realm, the protagonist needed something tangible even if it was false. The fight left him brutally injured, but he survives to come back to Sophie.

It is then that he receives another letter from Fanshawe, to meet him in Boston. The protagonist finally talks to Fanshawe, but in a bizarre setting: he is standing outside a locked door, behind which Fanshawe has a gun ready so that he can potentially kill the protagonist and claims to have drunk poison that is slowly killing him. He directs the protagonist's attention to the red notebook he had left outside, telling him that it contains the explanation he owes to the protagonist. After leaving the locked room behind, the protagonist reads the notebook at South Station and tells the reader that the previous two stories are in fact rewritten versions of the red notebook. The reader finally gets to peek into the red notebook in the following passage, even though still in words and interpretations of the protagonist:

All the words were familiar to me, and yet they seemed to have been put together strangely, as though their final purpose was to cancel each other out. I can think of no other way to express it. Each sentence erased the sentence before it, each paragraph made the next paragraph impossible. It is odd, then, that the feeling that survives from this notebook is one of great lucidity...He had answered the question by asking another question, and therefore everything remained open, unfinished, to be started again. I lost my way after the first word, and from then on I could only grope ahead, faltering in the darkness, blinded by the book that had been written for me. And yet, underneath this confusion, I felt there was something too willed, something too perfect, as though in the end the only thing he had really wanted was to fail—even to the point of failing himself. (370)



The red notebook thus becomes the paragon of textual labyrinths, and proves to be the labyrinth at the center of the labyrinth of *The New York Trilogy*, or at the same time, the one that surrounds and encompasses the latter. It embodies the superiority of human intelligence, but in order to escape it, the only way is to intentionally “fail.”

The reader thus realizes that what is written does not matter anymore. The comprehension of the red notebook of Fanshawe can provide nothing more than what the reader already learned from the three volumes thus far. The reader “knew” the story by heart all along. The arrival at the final truth or “the” story will be denied, permanently and perpetually, even if we were to read *The New York Trilogy* from the beginning again. Fanshawe points this out to the protagonist behind the locked door: “You can't possibly know what's true or not true. You'll never know” (368). The reader learns that to be in search of self and answer means to be forever confined in a labyrinth. Life is a wandering, with no promises of an answer. The locked room remains locked, like a period that follows a sentence or the entire novel. It begins with “It” that contains the fate and ends with the period of the locked room. Both “It” and the locked room contain the impenetrable labyrinth. Numerous interpretations and wanderings are allowed for and even called for, as the white page invites writing upon it. Yet the repetitive writings on a blank page will never reveal what its whiteness holds.

## Borges the Daedalus

In his book *Borges' Short Stories*,<sup>1</sup> Rex Butler notes that despite its current reputation as his “verbal trademark or signature” (16), the word “labyrinth” was not part of Borges’ lexicon until the 1930s. Butler reviews the publications of Borges’s translated works to locate its point of emergence and suggests that “the international reception of Borges in terms of the labyrinth retrospectively began to affect his work” (16). Roger Caillois entitles his French translation of Borges’s assorted works *Labyrinthes*, which was published in 1952. The first German translation of the writings bore the title *Labyrinth* as well. Finally, *Labyrinths* was the English title for a selection of Borges’s short stories and essays from *El Aleph*, *Ficciones* and *Otras Inquisiciones*, published in 1964. The fact that his short stories were mostly written and published in 1940s (*Fictions* and *Artifices* in 1944, *The Aleph* in 1949), which is *before* the publication of Caillois’s translation, may somewhat weaken Butler’s claim. Yet the connection he makes suggests how the labyrinth is perceived as being the central concept of Borges’s fiction by the translators, or careful readers.

Even though Borges, among the three authors discussed in this study, engages with physical labyrinths the most, his exploration of the concept extends far beyond their tangible walls or the mere word “labyrinth” because “not only do none of the stories in the English-language edition of *Labyrinths* contain the word ‘labyrinth’ in the title, but the two stories from *El Aleph* that actually do were excluded” (16). Borges’s usage of “labyrinth” resembles both wandering in the labyrinth and constructing one: comprehensive, impenetrable, frightening and exhilarating. Strikingly varied but at the same time coherent in their contradictions, Borges’s labyrinths push the boundaries of their own implications and blur them.

Six of Borges’s short stories from *Fictions* and *The Aleph* will be explored in this chapter. “The Circular Ruins” (1940) and “The House of Asterion” (1947), presented as

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<sup>1</sup> Butler, Rex. *Borges' Short Stories: A Reader's Guide*. London: Continuum, 2010. Print.

parables of Borges's fiction as much as "Before the Law" and "The Imperial Message" were of Kafka's, reintroduce key elements of labyrinths in the Borgesian context. The development and transformation of labyrinth begins in "Ibn-Hakam al Bokhari, Murdered in His Labyrinth" (1949) and continues in the incorporation of the detective genre in "Death and the Compass" (1942). The superposition of textual and temporal labyrinths in "The Garden of Forking Paths" (1941), which is also a twist on the detective genre, foreshadows the philosophical epic, "The Immortal" (1947). With the exception of "The Circular Ruins," the other five stories include a physical labyrinth. Yet in Borges's stories, physical labyrinths exist only to allow a conceptual departure from them. In fact, Borges "can describe as 'labyrinthine' such things as time, space, human destiny and even the world itself" (18), as Butler remarks. Such flexible and versatile derivations of the labyrinth are possible because it enables and represents innumerable possibilities of wandering within it, whereas its truth remains unattainable by definition. The labyrinth thus provides a privileged space of gray in which chaos and cosmos, mortality and immortality can coexist to define or nullify each other. To examine subtle variations in shades of gray, the reader enters Borgesian labyrinths, which distort the world, merge extremes, and switch perspectives.

### “The Circular Ruins” and “The House of Asterion”

Many of Borges’s short stories—in fact, four out of six stories discussed in this paper—begin with a quotation from a different text. The quotation immediately expands the textual realm presented in the writing by evoking the implied but invisible intertextuality in everything that follows, like a specter that hovers over the text. The reader-wanderer, at the explosion of possibilities of interpretation, does not and *cannot* access all the potential implications in Borgesian literature. As a result, wandering in Borges’s fiction is not only a succession of choices that the wanderer makes at each turn in the face of other possibilities, but also a demonstration of what little is known and revealed, as possible paths are opposed to numerous unknown ones.

A phrase of *Through the Looking Glass*, alluded to in *City of Glass* with Humpty Dumpty’s initials, opens “The Circular Ruins” (*Las Ruinas Circulares*): “*And if he left off dreaming about you...*” The following story accordingly tells of a sorcerer who wants “to dream a man...completely, in painstaking detail, and impose him upon reality.”<sup>2</sup> (45) The doubling of the creator and the created is repeated in the form of the dreamer and the dream. The idea of a willful dream, in which one can carry out a painstaking project, reverses the conventional notion of passive dream. However, in a metafictional sense, a dream is nothing more than an alternate reality constructed by the dreamer, so that the parallel between creation and dreaming becomes something more natural and familiar.

The protagonist, as a nameless foreigner from the South, is as a stranger as K. the Land Surveyor was, against this “unanimous night” (44). The color contrast between gray and red dominates the story. The temple is “a circular enclosure...which had once been the color of fire but was now the color of ashes” (44). In addition, the “gray man” (44) opposes Fire, the original idol of the ruins, as a mortal opposes an immortal. When the chaotic dreams become “dialectical” (45), the protagonist “fills” pupils with substantive knowledge. But when the man finally chooses one pupil who actually resembles him as the one to bring forth into reality, he suffers from insomnia and has to begin anew. In his second attempt, the man starts with a beating heart instead, to painstakingly *grow* the whole body of a

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<sup>2</sup> Borges, Jorge Luis. *Fictions*. Trans. Andrew Hurley. London: Penguin Books, 1998. Print.

youth. But when the body is complete, night after night, the man dreams of the youth asleep. After praying to the idol of the ruins, the man dreams Fire who promises to materialize the youth and instructs him how. Despite the grief of separation in this quasi father-son relationship, the man lets go of the youth and infuses in him "a total lack of memory of his years of education" (49). The man's existence has become weak and pale when he hears news of his creation: "a magical man in a temple in the North, a man who could walk on fire and not be burned" (49). The thought that his "son" may one day realize that he is but a creation of another's intelligence torments the gray man. His dread, like the one briefly experienced by Quinn in *City of Glass*<sup>3</sup>, is described thus: "To be not a man, but the projection of another man's dream—what incomparable humiliation, what vertigo!" (49). At the end of the story, however, when fire does not burn the sorcerer, "[w]ith relief, with humiliation, with terror, he realize[s] that he, too, [is] but appearance, that another man [is] dreaming him" (50). Whereas Quinn surmounts or evades the dread by becoming the writer, Borges's man experiences vertigo after having finished his task as a creator. Yet the identity of both is annihilated simultaneously with the act of creation, as the red notebook's pages ran out and as the gray existence between black words and white page is burnt by the Red fire.

The context of the opening quotation in fact foretells the ending. In this chapter of conversation with Tweedledee and Tweedledum, Alice talks about the snoring Red King:

"He's dreaming now," said Tweedledee: "and what do you think he's dreaming about?"

Alice said "Nobody can guess that."

"Why, about *you*!" Tweedledee exclaimed... "And if he left off dreaming about you, where do you suppose you'd be?"

"Where I am now, of course," said Alice.

"Not you!" Tweedledee retorted contemptuously. "You'd be nowhere. Why, you're only a sort of thing in his dream!"<sup>4</sup>

The idea of being a simulacrum, to employ Borges's vocabulary, frightens Alice so much that she cries, even though she later dismisses the thought and her reaction as being ridiculous. In fact, in his description of the man waking up from the dream of Fire—"In the

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<sup>3</sup> See p. 38.

<sup>4</sup> Carroll, Lewis. *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*. London: Penguin, 2011. < [http://0-gateway.proquest.com.luna.wellesley.edu/openurl/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pqil:res\\_ver=0.2&res\\_id=xri:lion-us&rft\\_id=xri:lion:ft:pr:Z001593850:0](http://0-gateway.proquest.com.luna.wellesley.edu/openurl/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pqil:res_ver=0.2&res_id=xri:lion-us&rft_id=xri:lion:ft:pr:Z001593850:0)>.

dreaming man's dream, the dreamed man awoke" (48)—Borges foreshadows the ending once again through the convoluted and complex grammatical structure of a sentence. Yet the confusion of creator and created and its layers of *mise-en-abyme* do not dissolve into the chaos of reality outside the book, as they did in Auster's fiction, but construct a seamless circle. But it is still made of bits and pieces of chaos, of shards of shattered existence: thus the title, "The Circular Ruins."

Borges enjoys a *coup de théâtre*<sup>5</sup> at the end of stories more than the other two writers discussed in this study. Whereas Kafka's characters perish slowly like the Hunger Artist or Gregor Samsa, and Auster's vanish, Borges's characters often experience sharp disruptions of reality and complete reversals of identity. In "The Circular Ruins," the dreamer learns that he is dreamed. "The House of Asterion" (*La casa de Asterión*) begins with the quote "And the queen gave birth to a son named Asterion" from Apollodorus' *Library*. At the end, the reader realizes that Asterion is the Minotaur and his house the archetypal Labyrinth.

The outrageous nature of the Minotaur's identity is not revealed by his narrative voice. The authority of first-person narrative is a particularly rare phenomenon in Borgesian literature which is often told in third person perspective, partially owing to the predominant narrative format of *mise-en-abyme*. Borges's use of the name Asterion instead of the Mino(s)/Taur lessens the stigma of being half-man and half-bull, and at the same time highlights his royal birth, as evoked in the opening quotation. Asterion begins the story by calmly refuting misconceptions on his existence:

I know that I am accused of arrogance and perhaps of misanthropy, and perhaps even of madness. These accusations (which I shall punish in due time) are ludicrous. It is true that I never leave my house, but it is also true that its doors (whose number is infinite) stand open night and day to men and also to animals.<sup>6</sup> (51)

Since the Minotaur's human aspect has always been repressed and considered as only a component of his monstrosity in the conventional reading of the myth, Asterion's clear self-consciousness and capacity of logical arguments surprise the reader (who knows that he is

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<sup>5</sup> *Coup de théâtre* : A sudden, surprising turn of events that gives a new twist to the plot of a play. Typical *coups de théâtre* involve the unveiling of a disguised character or the reappearance of one assumed by the audience to be dead. (The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.)

<sup>6</sup> Borges, Jorge Luis. *The Aleph*. Trans. Andrew Hurley. London: Penguin Books, 1998. Print.

the Minotaur). In addition to the royal birth ("Not for nothing was my mother a queen" (52)), his rational deduction and articulation suggest that Asterion's intelligence is on par with human intelligence if not superior. At the outbreak of horror in the crowd inspired by the sight of him, Asterion points to his royalty as the cause: "I cannot mix with commoners, even if my modesty should wish it" (52). Thus in this house with open doors, Asterion *chooses* to remain in his house the Labyrinth instead of bothering with the frightened commoners. Asterion also implies that he can leave whenever he wants to, as he has done before and thus suggests his capacity to navigate through the labyrinth freely. Designating different parts of labyrinths by the corpses of people sacrificed to him, Asterion appears to possess complete knowledge of the labyrinth's design. This freedom, which was denied even to Daedalus in the original myth, reinforces Asterion's claim that he is not a prisoner of, but a dweller in the Labyrinth. Dismissing the opinion that he is a prisoner as absurd, Asterion exclaims, "Need I repeat that the door stands open? Need I add that there is no lock?" (51)

Despite the superiority with which he distinguishes himself from people who live outside, the fact that Asterion is "unique" (52) renders him a sympathetic figure to the reader. Contemplating that "there are two things in the world that apparently exist but once—on high, the intricate sun, and below, Asterion" (53), he says that his favorite game, which he plays on his own, is pretending that there is another Asterion. Thus Minotaur the beast becomes Asterion the victim, persecuted by the incomprehensible world which abhors his existence and tormented by his loneliness, juxtaposed to the meaningless repetitions in the design of the Labyrinth. The doubling of self that confuses and destroys one's identity becomes an act of consolation and creation in "The House of Asterion." In the Labyrinth, therefore, the forlorn and unique existence is painful and unending until death. Wishing for his "redeemer" to come and save him from this labyrinth ("I hope he takes me to a place with fewer galleries and fewer doors" (53)), the Minotaur does not defend himself when Theseus slays him, reinforcing the sympathy the reader feels for him. Whereas unbearable loneliness characterizes the labyrinthine existence, so that it translates into the desperate wish for "escape," for Asterion, the escape is clearly not

defined as a physical one which can be managed anytime. Rather, it is an existential relief and liberation, which Asterion cannot attain by himself.

"The House of Asterion" reverses the perspective of the original myth, from the hero's to the villain's (who turns out to be a victim). Simultaneously, the Labyrinth draws sharp distinction between intra-labyrinth and extra-labyrinth realities. For instance, Asterion cannot profit from his royalty inside the Labyrinth, just as Josef K. was cut off from privileges he had as the high bank official inside the trial reality. Though it is an inadequate prison, without lock or door, the Labyrinth is not simply Asterion's house. It defines and confines his reality and his world.

### **"Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari, Murdered in His Labyrinth"**

"Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari, Murdered in His Labyrinth" (*Abenjacán el Bojarí, muerto en su laberinto*) is one of the few Borges stories that has the word "labyrinth" in its title, and the only one among the six discussed in this study. The labyrinth it features is visited by two friends, Dunraven the poet and Unwin the mathematician. As opposed to the timelessness of "The Circular Ruins" and the antiquity of "House of Asterion," the story of Ibn-Hakam is relatively recent, since it is said to be a quarter-century before the summer of 1914. Dunraven takes on the role of narrator to elaborately tell the story of Ibn-Hakam. The king fled after a rebellion and killed his faithful and cowardly cousin Said on his journey because Ibn-Hakam, the brave ruler, woke up terrified by a mere dream to find Said soundly asleep. Dying, Said muttered something Ibn-Hakam could not understand but heard clearly in his dream: "*As you slay me now, so shall I slay you, no matter where you flee*" (98). So Ibn-Hakam builds an elaborate labyrinth and hides in it so that Said's spirit cannot find him. But one day a ship arrives, and frightened Ibn-Hakam bursts into the rector's house but leaves quickly. Next day, the rector finds the ship gone, the slave and lion protecting the labyrinth dead, and Ibn-Hakam dead in the central chamber of the labyrinth. All of their faces have been smashed in. Dunraven tells the story to Unwin as they walk inside Ibn-Hakam's labyrinth, and because of the heavy rain, they are forced to spend the night in its central chamber. Having initially dismissed the story as being a lie, Unwin the mathematician later thinks he has "solved" the mystery of Ibn-Hakam. He proposes a



theory that it was Said, after all, who took the gold Ibn-Hakam was carrying in the run and lacked the courage to actually kill the king. When Said built the labyrinth, he was not trying to hide from the king but to lure him and to kill him, to finally *become* Ibn-Hakam:

"...The essential thing was that Ibn-Hakam die. He pretended to be Ibn-Hakam, killed Ibn-Hakam, and at last *was* Ibn-Hakam."

"Yes," agreed Dunraven. "He was a wanderer who, before becoming no one in death, would recall once having been a king, or having pretended to be a king." (104)

That Ibn-Hakam/Said commissions the construction of the labyrinth for his own purpose scarcely makes him a figure of Daedalus. In this aspect, he is more like Minos. Dunraven as a boy sees Ibn-Hakam/Said himself and curiously calls him "the King of Babel" (97), reinforcing the similarity between Minos and Ibn-Hakam as being kings. But if he is Ibn-Hakam, scared of the ghost of Said, he is also Minos, who flees the presence of the Minotaur and to lock himself up in the labyrinth. On the other hand, if he is Said, luring the king to become the king himself, he is Theseus, lying low and waiting for the Minotaur to walk his way. The reader-wanderer thus not only encounters different possibilities of interpretation, but also comes to acknowledge various functions a physical labyrinth can serve. Whereas Asterion's labyrinth is not a jail but a house, Said's turns out to be not a refuge, but a trap *and* a house. As Asterion could freely go in and out of the labyrinth, Ibn-Hakam could freely visit the rector's and maintain a normal life in the central chamber through the help of his slave. As a result, the reader comes to ask oneself: is a Borgesian labyrinth built to make the wanderer lost at all? If it is a jail or a hiding place, the labyrinth should be impenetrable. Yet if it is a house or a trap to lure the king into its center, the labyrinth is *meant* to be navigable, like the classical labyrinth with only one path to follow until the wanderer reaches the center.

The successful wandering of the physical labyrinth parallels the successful "figuring out" of the labyrinth in this story. The shape of Ibn-Hakam's labyrinth is unknowable, because even though its walls appear to be straight lines, they supposedly constitute "a circle, but one so broad that its curvature was imperceptible" (96). But the physical penetration and staying overnight in Ibn-Hakam's central chamber grant Unwin the comprehension of the conceptual labyrinth, which is the story of the labyrinth. Unwin

persuasively argues that "[a] fleeing man...doesn't throw up a crimson-colored labyrinth that sailors see from miles offshore" (101). His comment that "[t]here's no need to build a labyrinth when the entire universe is one. For the man who truly wants to hide himself, London is a much better labyrinth..." (101-102) evokes the city-labyrinth in Auster's fiction and the modern *flâneur*. The association between physical and conceptual labyrinths identifies and confuses a) Ibn-Hakam/Said who enters the other's labyrinth in pursuit of the other, b) Unwin who engages with the story to untangle its obscurities, and finally, c) the reader who tries to find and choose a satisfying explanation, the one idea that will make sense of the rest. The concentric circles—that is, *if* they are circles—of the story Dunraven tells and the text Borges writes surround Unwin and the reader who seek the common core of the two, the center where the truth supposedly lies. The straight lines of text thus form a circular labyrinth in which the reader wanders. Is the name of "Unwin" indicative of the fate of Borges's reader? Conjectures multiply but fail to build one truth, just as multiple languages cannot erect the Tower of Babel—alluded to by the epithet "the King of Babel."

### "Death and the Compass"

When Dunraven enumerates mysteries, Unwin replies:

"Please—let's not multiply the mysteries," he said. "Mysteries ought to be simple. Remember Poe's purloined letter, remember Zangwill's locked room."  
"Or complex," volleyed Dunraven. "Remember the universe." (96)

The literary genre of detective fiction is evoked as a labyrinth that superimposes order on primal chaos. Maurice J. Bennett, in his comparative essay on Poe and Borges, designates the detective in the conventional genre as "an outsider existing spiritually and intellectually beyond the convention of ordinary humanity," so that the detective story becomes "an anti-realist genre, a kind of intellectual fantasy."<sup>7</sup> (264). Borges exploits the "fantastic" nature of the detective genre and evolves it into a full-fledged text labyrinth, in which anything is possible, such as dreaming and creating a man.

"Death and the Compass" (*La muerte y la brújula*) is a labyrinthine story like that of Ibn-Hakam, and employs familiar stereotypes of detective fiction. The ingenious detective,

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<sup>7</sup> Bennett, Maurice J. "The Detective Fiction of Poe and Borges." *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (Summer, 1983). Print. pp. 262-275.

Lönnrot, opposes the clever criminal, Red Scharlach, whose brother Lönnrot had sent to jail before and who now seeks revenge for his brother. The relation between the two reminds the reader of that between Sherlock and Moriarty. There is also a Lestrade: the police commissioner Treviranus. The ironic twist in Borges's story is that Treviranus, who believes in the obvious explanation, is the right one instead of Lönnrot, who dismisses Treviranus's opinion as being "[p]ossible, but uninteresting" (*Fictions*, 112). When Treviranus calls the victim an "unknown man" (112), Lönnrot points to the piles of books written by him. Thus the identification of the written and the writer occurs, as in *The Locked Room*. Lönnrot's predilection for a creative and unusual case drives him to search for "a purely rabbinical explanation" (112) and enables Red Scharlach to lay a fake case, a labyrinth to lure Lönnrot. In retrospect, the reader is reminded that Treviranus's dubious voice could as well have saved Lönnrot's life: "What if tonight's story were a sham, a simulacrum?" (116) But Lönnrot follows his path until the end, drawn by the problem-solving fascination that a case offers to a detective and a labyrinth offers to a wanderer.

Borges employs the word "labyrinth" to describe Scharlach's plan, which becomes an 'ideal' labyrinth as opposed to the physical architecture of the Villa Triste-le-Roy. Scharlach tells Lönnrot later that he prayed to "weave a labyrinth around the man who had imprisoned [his] brother" and declares, at the end of the story, that he has woven one which stood firm (121). When the "truth" is revealed, Lönnrot's case is immediately encased by Scharlach's plot. As the perspectives of the Minotaur and of Theseus and those of Ibn-Hakam and of Said were reversed at the end of their stories, so Scharlach in the end takes over the narrative voice and the perspective previously monopolized by Lönnrot. Then the creator/criminal literally kills the detective/wanderer. Scharlach and Lönnrot mirror each other like Blue and Black in *Ghosts*. Not only is their intelligence on a par, but their minds work in a similar way, since otherwise, Scharlach's elaborate labyrinth would have failed. In addition, Scharlach's name reminds us of Sherlock, implying that he is also a detective figure, perhaps the one who surpasses Lönnrot. The red of Fire in "Circular Ruins" and of the labyrinth in "Ibn-Hakam..." also blazes both their names: *rot* (red in German) and *Scharlach* (Scarlet in German) and Red, written thus in English when the original story is in

Spanish. When *Lön* means pay, salary and repayment in Swedish, his name finally means red repayment as in bloody revenge.

Scharlach's labyrinth of plot has a center and an endpoint in the physical labyrinth of "the house belonging to the Villa Triste-le-Roy," which "abounded in pointless symmetries and obsessive repetitions" (119). Pondering on the maxim "All roads lead to Rome," Scharlach realizes that "the world was a labyrinth, impossible to escape—for all roads, even if they pretended to lead north or south, returned finally to Rome" (121), like the classical labyrinth in which a wanderer inexorably reaches the center. Scharlach's contemplation renders all who walk on earth wanderers, whose fate is grounded in the world-labyrinth. Yet as the world-labyrinth metaphor emerges, the way out disappears. This explains why Asterion could not find deliverance by leaving his house. Asterion's fate was neither in the center of the Labyrinth nor outside; it was embodied by and restricted to the walls that exiled him. But whereas Asterion waits for his redeemer, the wanderers in the world-labyrinth do not realize their status. What is most unsettling in Lönnrot's fate is that he follows the paths of Scharlach's labyrinth willfully and almost delightfully, with a false sense of what the entire labyrinth means. The individual and independent will in life proves to be illusive and phantasmagorical, so that Lönnrot experiences "an impersonal, almost anonymous sadness" (123) at the end.

Three murders happen before Treviranus receives a map showing that the crime scenes constitute an equilateral triangle. However, Lönnrot is reminded of the word Tetragrammaton,<sup>8</sup> which suggests that there will be fourth crime which completes a rhombus. The Villa Triste-le-Roy stands at the place that completes the geometry. Lönnrot says, before being killed by Scharlach, that there are three lines too many in Scharlach's labyrinth, for he knows of "a Greek labyrinth that is but one straight line," which "many philosophers have been lost upon" (123). His comment reminds the reader of Unwin thinking of "Nicholas of Cusa, for whom every straight line was the arc of an infinite circle" (*The Aleph*, 96). The typical concept of labyrinth as winding paths and crossroads is again

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<sup>8</sup> Tetragrammaton, which literally means "four letters" in Greek, refers to the Hebrew theonym (יהוה) transliterated to the Latin letters YHWH.

challenged, since one straight line upon which one can get lost is paradoxical. As Scharlach promises to kill Lönnrot next time in "the labyrinth that consists of a single straight line that is invisible and endless" (*Fictions*, 123), the visibility, along with the comprehensibility, of labyrinth is defied. Furthermore, the promise to make *another* labyrinth and to kill the other person *again* in *another* life reinforces the circularity of fate trapped within the walls of labyrinths.

### "The Garden of Forking Paths"

"The Garden of Forking Paths" (*El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*) is not strictly a detective story but something similar: a spy story. The story is introduced by a reader-narrator, who compares two texts: *The History of World War* by Liddell Hart and the memoir of Yu Tsun, a Chinese spy for Germany during World War I, which is the following story. The fact that the first two pages are missing enhances suspense typical of the genre.

Yu Tsun's story begins with hanging up after a phone call, followed by the realization that his status as spy has been revealed, so that it is certain that he will be arrested and killed in near future. The telephone call penetrates yet again a layer of secrecy and protection. Trying to communicate information about a village that is going to be bombed, Yu Tsun decides to murder a man who has the village's name. Declaring himself a coward, Yu Tsun explains the motivation behind his murder: "because [he] sensed that the leader looked down on the people of [his] race—the countless ancestors whose blood flows through [his] veins. [He] wanted to prove to him that a yellow man could save his armies" (77). Richard Madden, an English spy in pursuit of Yu Tsun, proves to be his double: an "Irishman at the orders of the English, a man accused of a certain lack of zealousness, perhaps even treason" and thus a man who is "obliged to be implacable" (76).

Though hinted at, Yu Tsun's motive in visiting Stephen Albert is not clarified until the end. Not knowing why Yu Tsun acts as he does, but still tailing his moves rigorously, the reader follows him into the labyrinth of obscurity and coincidences. A group of boys at the station seem to know in advance that Yu Tsun is headed to Albert's house. The directions they give—"you'll not get lost if you follow that road there to the left, and turn left at every

crossing"—is the same as "the common way of discovering the central lawn of a certain type of maze" (79). So on his way to Albert's house, Yu Tsun ponders about his great-grandfather Ts'ui Pen, who "renounced all temporal power in order to write a novel...and construct a labyrinth in which all men would lose their way" (79). He imagines "a labyrinth of labyrinths, a maze of mazes, a twisting, turning, ever-widening labyrinth that contained both past and future and somehow implied the stars." Forgetting that he was a pursued man, he feels that he has become "the abstract perceiver of the world."

The name of the village where Stephen Albert lives, Ashgrove, along with Albert's physical features of "grey eyes, and a grey beard" (81), indicate the arrival at the gray zone of labyrinth. The random Stephen Albert found in a phone book, the only one, like the "Paul Auster" Quinn finds, readily welcomes the spy and his to-be-murderer, for he mistakes him for a Chinese consul. Albert turns out to be a Sinologist and in fact, an expert on Ts'ui Pen, Yu Tsun's own eminent ancestor. The way to find Albert's house designates it as both physical center of the labyrinth that Yu Tsun enters and the endpoint/center of his labyrinthine scheme. Thus in these concentric circles of labyrinths, Yu Tsun becomes a wanderer/creator; he is both Quinn who becomes Paul Auster and Scharlach weaving a labyrinth for his own end. Once inside Albert's house, however, Yu Tsun slips from his own labyrinth into another labyrinth reality, as Lönnrot did in the Villa Triste-le-Roy. Whereas Lönnrot unexpectedly encounters the hostile labyrinth of revenge, Yu Tsun, who comes with an aggressive aim, is engulfed by Albert's explanation of his ancestor's labyrinth. The past of his lineage explained by a foreigner is mirrored and distorted in his act of espionage for a foreign country. The past and present are interwoven also through the complicated usage of *mise-en-abyme*: *The Garden of Forking Paths* is written by Ts'ui Pen, explained by Stephen Albert, found in the process of espionage of Yu Tsun, who in turn narrates his memoir, which is recorded in a historical document, which is again told by Borges, whose story's title is again, "The Garden of Forking Paths."

A circular labyrinth of infinity is also found in Ts'ui Pen's *The Garden of Forking Paths*. Albert describes his initial speculations on it in the following passage:

The only way...was that it be a cyclical, or circular volume, a volume whose last page would be identical to the first, so that one might go on indefinitely. I also recalled that night at the centre of the *1001 Nights*,<sup>9</sup> when the queen Scheherazade begins to retell, verbatim, the story of *1001 Nights*, with the risk of returning once again to the night on which she is telling it—and so on, *ad infinitum*. (82-83)

However, Ts'ui Pen's book is more than a line turned circle that repeats itself. He instead creates several futures, simultaneous possibilities that can result from the character's choice of action, thus making a labyrinth with paths that fork in time instead of in space. Ts'ui Pen's effort is thus to embody a labyrinth that cradles numerous possibilities of wanderings, via text, especially fiction. It is like not knowing what the labyrinth looks like, but suggesting the form by presenting diverse possible journeys, superimposed upon one another. A wandering traced on a map, like that of Peter Stillman, demonstrates a spatial dimension but precludes a temporal one. In Ts'ui Pen's *The Garden of Forking Paths*, the temporality of many possible threads of narrative is stacked in layers, profoundly confusing a reader who is used to cause-and-effect linearity of time. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan contrasts the timelessness of text with the temporality of a character's action:

[The] language parallels timelessness, whereas action is time-bound. By its very nature, a sign is reproducible...time transcending and in a sense "eternal." On the other hand, action, and in particular a radical action like murder, is irreversible, irreproducible, and hence bound to the flux of time. (643)<sup>10</sup>

But she also remarks that "no repeated occurrence is identical with another, since the context in which the sign appears automatically changes it" (644). Timelessness of text as opposed to constantly changing context is demonstrated in the story as different layers of *mise-en-abyme*, which present diverse ways through which a text transfers: narration, diction, quotation and publication. Yet at "the" present moment of the fiction, the prospect of immediate cause-and-effect linearity governs the reader's expectation, so that the suspense builds up, in our not knowing what Yu Tsun would do to this eminent Sinologist.

Uncannily, Albert's explanation of the book reflects his own precarious situation: "for example, you come to this house, but in one of the possible pasts you are my enemy, in

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<sup>9</sup> Borges enjoys writing the title in this way so that he can demonstrate the symmetry of the number.

<sup>10</sup> Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith. "Doubles and Counterparts: Patterns of Interchangeability in Borges' "The Garden of Forking Paths"." *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (Summer, 1980). Print. pp. 639-647.

another my friend" (83); and "Time forks, perpetually into countless futures. In one of them, I am your enemy" (86). By his to-be-victim's words, Yu Tsun is repeatedly reminded that he still has a choice. The "countless futures" almost materialize in Yu Tsun's mind, so that they overwhelm him and arouse a sensation of "pullulation":

I sensed that the dewdrenched garden that surrounded the house was saturated, infinitely, with invisible persons. Those persons were Albert and myself—secret, busily at work, multi-form—in other dimensions of time. (86)

In the central chamber of his own labyrinth of scheme and fate, Yu Tsun can choose whichever path is forking from it. But the profound irony lies in the fact that despite the tension, the reader already knows what happens. The "future" is already "written," literally, and the idea of having any kind of choice is illusionary. As Frances Wyers Weber points out, in this textual labyrinth, "[e]ach present is discontinuous and autonomous, and the future, since it is not tied to a causal chain, is no more subject to willful modifications than the past. No character can determine his fate."<sup>11</sup> (136) At the same time, the timelessness of text is impenetrable for the fleeting existence of wanderer. The labyrinth's unexplored possibilities are numerous and will remain unknown.

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<sup>11</sup> Weber, Frances Wyers. "Borges's Stories: Fiction and Philosophy." *Hispanic Review*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Apr., 1968). Print. pp. 124-141.



## "The Immortal"

"The Immortal" (*El immortal*) is a story on the relationship between the labyrinth and time in the context of human fate and individuality. Borges yet again opens the story with a quote:

*Solomon saith: There is no new thing upon the earth.  
So that as Plato had an imagination, that all  
knowledge was but remembrance; so Solomon giveth  
his sentence, that all novelty is but oblivion.*

*Francis Bacon: Essays, LVIII (The Aleph, 3)*

Bacon writing about Solomon's idea, similar to Plato's, emphasizes the transcendence of individuality and time enabled by text. At the same time, the quotation implies the following story's structure of *mise-en-abyme*. "The Immortal," in addition to the quotation, has a prologue discussing the origin of the text, as in "Garden of Forking Paths." Supposedly, Borges's friend in real life, the princess de Lucinge, bought six volumes of Pope's *Iliad* from a rare book dealer, Joseph Cartaphilus, and the following story is the manuscript found inside those copies. Joseph Cartaphilus is the original name of the Wandering Jew in Christian mythology, a man cursed to walk the earth until Jesus comes again, as a punishment for having insulted Jesus. Again, Borges deftly combines the reality out of fiction (his own friend) and the old myth (Wandering Jew) to create a new textual realm of his own. The effect is to produce a mystical atmosphere of fiction that thrives at the border of the real and the unreal. At the same time, two texts, Pope's *Iliad* and the manuscript written in English, immediately introduce a multiplicity of languages and authors: Pope's *Iliad* is the translation of Homer's; the English manuscripts that teem with Latinisms were originally read in Spanish by Borges's reader. Translation, as much as quotation, represents the power of text in merging different languages, different times and different authors in a single point.

The fiction tells the story of Marcus Flaminius Rufus, who journeys to find the City of Immortals. He finds it, though in starkly different fashion than his imagination, and becomes an immortal himself. Suffering from the gray existence of immortality, he searches for the river that will make him mortal again. It appears that he does find one. Owing to the

previous reference to the *Iliad* and the traces of Homeric text scattered throughout, the story evokes *Odyssey*. Both Odysseus and Rufus venture past the boundaries of the known human world. Both return and "Argo" greets them. Rufus calls the Troglodyte who followed him thus, probably because of both his dog-like simplicity and the fact that he was waiting for his "return" from the anti-City. Odysseus' dog was in fact the first to recognize him though he was under disguise donned by Athena. With the wildest stroke of pen, Borges transforms the illiterate and barbaric Argos into Homer himself in "The Immortal." Is "The Immortal" perhaps a rewrite of the *Odyssey*, which reimagines the aftermath of the open-ended fate of Odysseus, who embarks on yet another journey after the glorious and long-sought-after homecoming, just as *The New York Trilogy* was composed entirely of rewrites of the red notebook?

Many labyrinths can be identified in "The Immortal," to the point that it can be legitimately said that the story is a labyrinth of labyrinths. The first one in Rufus's dream precedes his transformation into an immortal. At the beginning, Rufus almost accidentally embarks on the quest to find the City of Immortals, after hearing about it from a bloody rider. He loses the two hundred soldiers during his arduous journey and reaches the City alone. Lost in the desert without water, Rufus dreams of "a small and orderly labyrinth at whose center lay a well" (*The Aleph*, 6). This dreamed labyrinth is introduced right after Borges uses the word "weave" in describing the plot of Rufus's soldier to murder him, which echoes Scharlach's plan and Said/Ibn-Hakam's to lure/trap the enemy. The dream is invisible and conceptual like Scharlach's labyrinth. But instead of the death of revenge, the dreamer's survival lies in its center, even though he feels that he will die before reaching it, due to "bewildering and entangled" turns of the labyrinth (6). He wakes up and finally drinks from the dirty and sandy water, which happened to be *the* river of immortality. Once arrived at the center of this labyrinth, a rebirth of new self occurs, in this case, by becoming immortal.

The City of Immortals becomes the labyrinth in the center of labyrinths, which bridges mortality and immortality. Two physical labyrinths constitute the visit to the City: the way into the City and the City itself. The labyrinthine passage to the City is designated

by misery and anxiety amid profound darkness. Though he starts the journey to reach the City, Rufus enters the first labyrinth accidentally. When he cannot find an entrance to the City after investigating its intimidating walls, he simply looks for a refuge for the night, and stumbles upon it. He "wandered under the earth" (8) in fear, evoking his status as *the* Wandering Jew. His entrance to the City after journeying through the nightmarish space is characterized by joy and salvation: "a distant light [that] fell upon [him]" and "a circle of sky so blue it was almost purple" (8). However, this powerful emotional response is short-lived, because what he finds in the City is yet another gigantic labyrinth. The reader later learns that the Immortals have built an antithesis of the original famed city after having destroyed it. The description of the labyrinth as "a temple to the irrational gods that rule the world and to those gods about whom we know nothing save that they do not resemble man" (13) reminds the reader of Scharlach's prayer to "the god who sees with two faces and...all the gods of fever and of mirrors" (*Fictions*, 121). Rufus moves through the anti-City with caution, indifference, and then desperation. The antiquity of the architecture belittles his religion since it produces "sacred horror" (8). In the end, he feels something more like "intellectual horror than sensory fear" (9). In Rufus at first and defies comprehension by a mere mortal. Rufus thinks that whereas "[a] maze is a house built purposely to confuse men...the palace had *no* purpose" (9). The purposelessness does not explain anything or allow an attempt of elucidation. "[T]he impression of endlessness, the sensation of oppressiveness and horror, the sensation of complex irrationality" (9) characterizes the experience of the anti-City of Immortals. Other previous labyrinths in Borgesian literature had a meaning and a purpose, though not always clearly presented. The Minotaur's was to imprison (or Asterion's was to take refuge) and Ibn-Hakam's was to hide (or Said's was to trap); Scharlach's was to revenge whereas Lönnrot's was to solve; Yu Tsun's was to fulfill his mission and to discover his fate, Albert's was to gain intellectual pleasure, and Ts'ui Pen's was to represent time in his novel. But the Immortals' does not have any. It is a temple of irrationality, celebration of chaos.

*The Garden of Forking Paths* by Ts'ui Pen begins with a certain moment with a certain character, then moves into endless bifurcations, like the center of the labyrinth

from which many paths stem. Parallel and simultaneous temporal dimensions multiply and their specters make the space densely populated. On the other hand, immortality is the one invisible straight line of the labyrinth that Scharlach promised. In one endless life of one immortal, "all things happen to all men":

Homer composed the *Odyssey*; given infinite time, with infinite circumstances and changes, it is impossible that the *Odyssey* should *not* be composed at least once. No one is someone; a single immortal man is all men. Like Cornelius Agrippa, I am god, hero, philosopher, demon, and world—which is a long-winded way of saying that *I am not*. (14)

Productive pullulation dissolves into everything/nothingness. Thus the convergence of identities of Rufus and Homer at the end of the story does not seem radical or refutable. As the remnants of his memory are but words, like Homer's existence that survives history, the merge happens—and could only have happened—in the textual sphere. "[T]here are no longer any images from memory—there are only words," writes Rufus/Homer. The text labyrinth of Cartaphilus/Rufus/Homer is erected by mere "[w]ords, words, words taken out of place and mutilated, words from other men" (19) and is thus vulnerable to interpretations that are contingent on the individuality of reader and the context. In addition, as "the appropriation by one person of the speech of another," quotation threatens "the absolute autonomy of the self" (Rimmon-Kenan 646).

However, removed from the surface reality of fiction, Borges the writer remains the ultimate figure of an indifferent god, observing the wanderers in his labyrinth from the bird's-eye view. The figure of the writer, symbolized by Homer (and often by Shakespeare in Borgesian literature, as in "Everything and Nothing") allows the identification of many people with one person, for a writer creates many at the point of his pen: "I have been Homer; soon, like Ulysses, I shall be Nobody; soon, I shall be all men—I shall be dead" (18). The accumulation of fictional characters within the identity of a writer challenges his individuality as one man. Similarly, the enumeration of different "lives" in an immortal's eternity cannot define him as an individual. Odysseus gets away from the Cyclops in *Odyssey* by saying that his name is "Nobody." Thus the only way to escape from the labyrinthine existence is death and self-annihilation, as it was for Joseph K. Soon a theory emerges among immortals: in infinite time and possibility, if there is a river of immortality,

there must be another river of mortality. As a result, the immortals literally become wanderers in the world in search of the river of mortality, to find release from their gray, obscure and indefinite existence. We can note yet again the contrast of gray and red in "The Immortal." Rufus's middle name Flaminus has "flame," which represents fire, life, blood and redness whereas Joseph Cartaphilus is described as "an emaciated, grimy man with gray eyes and gray beard and singularly vague features" (3). In immortality, Rufus is no longer Flaminus but all men and thus no one. The red blood of life can also represent death, and as a matter of fact, the first sign of regained mortality for Rufus was a drop of blood. But ironically, in the universality of death, everyone is again the same. Also, the death puts an end to any kind of substantial existence, which amounts to becoming no one. Yet death in the context of immortality celebrates and defines life:

Death (or reference to death) makes men precious and pathetic; their ghostliness is touching; any act they perform may be their last; there is no face that is not on the verge of blurring and fading away like the faces in a dream. Everything in the world of mortals has the value of the irrecoverable and contingent. (15)

Thus mortality becomes the finite wandering in the infinite labyrinth. Immortality is a succession of wanderings inside the time labyrinth that is linear, endless and meaningless. Being a mortal, the only way to reach out of one-dimensional ignorance inside a labyrinth is to make the wings in words that can weather history. Borges the Daedalus weaves his textual labyrinth and challenges every single word spoken, again, by words. Instead of destroying or surmounting a labyrinth, the act expands and propagates labyrinths so that the world has no other shape but labyrinths of labyrinths in Borgesian literature.

## Conclusion

### Labyrinth, the Shape of the Modern Mind

We are unknown, we knowers, ourselves to ourselves: this has its own good reason. We have never searched for ourselves—how should it then come to pass, that we should ever *find* ourselves? (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, Preface)<sup>1</sup>

The reader of a labyrinth joins the characters to become the wanderer himself. Each reading of a labyrinth represents an attempt to figure it out. Whereas the text stays solid like physical walls of a labyrinth, the reader's wanderings multiply along with his conjectures about overall shape or meaning of the labyrinth. In the modern world, however, the simple clue of Ariadne's thread is forever lost. Pre-labyrinth amnesia manifests as a predominant feature of labyrinthine experience. Even when the wanderer retains the memory of entrance, it is often situated in time instead of, or as well as, in space, so that retracing one's steps to find one's way out turns out to be impossible. As the memory of entrance is challenged, so the presence of exit is questioned. Similarly, a particular reading can be contested by the reader's own later reading due to changing thoughts and accumulating experience in life. Thus any number of readings by any number of readers cannot possibly grasp the essence of the text in its totality. Ovid's metaphor of "the playful waters" also reminds us of the constantly changing nature of a labyrinth, for the passages "flow this way and that, without any consistency, as the river, turning to meet itself, and sees its own advancing waves... always changing its direction."<sup>2</sup> Made of time, thought and life, a labyrinth's design is as fluid as capricious. Finding one's way out via remembrance is futile, as Proust discovers while composing *A la recherche du temps perdu*.

Thus the wanderer realizes that the wandering does not draw him any nearer to "the" truth. The understanding of text becomes complicated and unresolved in the intertextual realm where voices from past, present and future as well as those of self and others intermix. As a result, the reading becomes therefore yet another labyrinth. The

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<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. *The Genealogy of Morals*. Trans. Horace B. Samuel. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2003. Print. p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. p. 183.

textual labyrinth on the page and its conceptual understanding in the reader's mind become inseparable. The wanderings multiply, potentially outlining "the" meaning of the text, or the labyrinth in the text, but without ever yielding the final answer.

The same process occurs in life inside the world-labyrinth. Life becomes a wandering between unrecoverable past and unknowable future. Familiar with the complexities of metropolitan cities in both spatial and social dimensions, a modern reader identifies with the city-labyrinth, which can expand and become the world-labyrinth. But the extrapolation of a city-labyrinth alone into the world-labyrinth is incomplete and problematic. Consider *The Castle* and Josef K.'s assessment that fleeing to countryside will not help him escape the trial-labyrinth. The reader thus realizes that the labyrinth is not only a piece of architecture, exterior to a wanderer, but also a psychological one inside his mind: a modern man carries the labyrinth in his own heart wherever he goes. We have already seen in *The Locked Room* that to understand another human being—his life and psychology—is to penetrate a labyrinth. Yet the mirrorings, doublings, and *Doppelgänger*s unveil a contingent and horrifying fact: that the act of self-comprehension is also navigation through an unnavigable labyrinth. In the contemporary concept of labyrinth, which implies the convoluting passages of a maze, one cannot simply turn around at the center of a labyrinth in order to successfully complete pilgrimage and meditation. Though the experience in a labyrinth allows one to become hyperconscious of surrounding and self at the same time, both turn out to be incomprehensible.

The Minotaur, reinterpreted in the modern context, can amount to the symbol of modern existence. Unique, solitary, and misunderstood, the Minotaur is confined to the labyrinth, but free to explore it. As the Minotaur or the archetypal Labyrinth cannot be defined without one another, a modern man is imprisoned in the labyrinth and at the same time, *is* a labyrinth himself. As a result, the only way to achieve freedom is self-annihilation which is represented in the myth as Theseus' slaying of the Minotaur. Theseus consequently becomes the double of the Minotaur, materialized to satisfy the desire of escape, whose violence is reenacted in K.'s condemnation of Franz to the thrashing and Blue's near-killing of Black. However, despite the release the doubling can offer, the

complete resolution is not accomplished since Theseus remains behind in the world without Ariadne's thread. As a result, Theseus replaces and *becomes* the Minotaur, as half-liberator and half-prisoner—yet another wanderer.

The a wanderer still continues the search for self, order and meaning that will perhaps allow him to rise above the horizontal limbo of labyrinth and finally acquire a bird's-eye view. So Daedalus constructs wings. But as the creator of the Labyrinth and the wooden cow in which Pasiphaë could satisfy her desire, Daedalus also becomes the father of the Minotaur and thus represents the order of Minos. The mirroring between Minos and Daedalus is produced. Minos commands Daedalus to be imprisoned and Daedalus' Labyrinth in turn imprisons both Minos' (though but in name) son and his own. The Minotaur's death then parallels and foreshadows Icarus' fall. Also, as the name Asterion was the haunting vestige of Minos' patriarchal lineage, and the bull of his maternal one, Icarus' fate seems to have resulted from his father's deed as well, because it is said that Daedalus was exiled from Athens for pushing his ingenious nephew off the Acropolis out of jealousy. In the labyrinthine life of Daedalus, the Labyrinth stands as the central chamber from which both past and future fork, connected and combined. The access to the vertical dimension of the labyrinth is denied even for its own creator, for the labyrinth becomes an embodiment of fate.

To depart from conventions surrounding the archetypal Labyrinth further and to clarify the characteristics shared by the labyrinths discussed in this paper, we can ask ourselves for more examples of such labyrinths. Sudoku isn't, but a chessboard is. Anagrams are not if they have only one possible answer, but poetry is. Memory, history, knowledge are; and so are human relationships and cause-and-effects in life.

The ultimate labyrinth that concerns the writers I studied and me as a reader is, however, language, which produces the aforementioned labyrinths as well as constituting the wanderings inside them. With limited number of symbols, a system of language can include the world itself (wor(l)d) and transcend its creator's intention as well as his lifetime. Both the reader and the writer are thus mere *flâneurs* of language. One text written by one, but read and interpreted by many, becomes populated with ghosts of the



writer and readers, outlining the overall shape of the labyrinth, which surpasses its black traces on blank pages. The writer-reader's vertical hierarchy is conventionally supported by hermeneutical reading and the idea of the text as the Holy Grail of "the truth." But as Daedalus becomes imprisoned, the writer no longer can lay claim to an all-powerful authority upon his own text labyrinth. The intertextual nature of modern text contributes to the complex genealogy of thought and text in one's mind, so that one writer's genius is contested, just as an immortal's succession of different lives cannot give him an individual identity.

This gray view of existence and literature does not, however, stop a wanderer from drifting in the world-labyrinth, a reader from trying to understand, or a writer from encrypting the labyrinth. With irrevocable past behind and unpredictable future ahead, a wanderer's existence is bound to the wandering as a character's is bound to the text in which he can breathe and stay "alive." Thus the search for cosmos in chaos in text becomes an effort to bestow meaning on the modern existence. The journeys inside a labyrinth become more important than the labyrinth itself, as the words across this page are more important than the whiteness beneath.

We can never know what to want, because, living only one life, we can neither compare it with our previous lives nor perfect it in our lives to come...We live everything as it comes, without warning, like an actor going on cold. (Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*)<sup>3</sup>

Thus life is but one wandering inside the world-labyrinth, which looms with an enormous number of possibilities. In the text/world-labyrinth, what one reads or writes or thinks becomes but one wandering as well, a single book in the vastness of the Library of Babel. We do not and cannot know what the other books hold, though we can always try; and the attempt will in turn propagate another labyrinth, incomprehensible and timeless.

But precisely in its inaccessibility and impenetrability, the labyrinth becomes the finitude that encompasses infinity: a thrilling prospect for a mortal and an irresistible

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<sup>3</sup> Kundera, Milan. *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1984. Print. p. 8.

## Conclusion

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### Labyrinth, the Shape of the Modern Mind

challenge to a thinker to come up with an elaborate and elegant design as well as perspicacious interpretation.

This particular wandering in the intertextual realm of three writers' work is also but one *flânerie* among many. The interpretation of this wandering, as indicative of an invisible labyrinth, may generate labyrinths of labyrinths via the role of the reader—and so on, *ad infinitum*.

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